



Appendix 3

Development Department

Dr Jacqueline Witherow
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Belfast
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Dear Jacqueline,

RE: Ambitions for the Arts: A Five-year Strategic Plan for the Arts in Northern Ireland 2013–18

Please find attached our provisional response to this consultation document. Please note that this is still subject to final ratification by full Council on 1 May 2013.

Provisional Response

1.1. Background: Belfast City Council's support for culture and arts

1.1.1. As the Arts Council is aware, Belfast City Council is strongly committed to supporting culture and arts in the city. In February 2012, the Council launched its innovative £150m Investment Programme, which recognises that arts is a key driver of the city's economy. This was followed in October 2012 by the three-year arts strategy, the Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15 ('Cultural Framework'). Our vision is that

By 2020, everyone in Belfast experiences and is inspired by our city's diverse and distinctive culture and arts. Arts and heritage are valued for enriching quality of life and creating wealth, and the city's culture and creativity is renowned throughout the world.

1.1.2. In March 2013, we committed £4.1m to fund 52 arts and cultural organisations over a three-year period. Just under £500,000 will also be made available for new projects each year. This funding will help support more than 400 jobs, 4,000 artists and 700 volunteers. The collective programme will involve almost 100,000 participants and be seen by up to four million people during 2013/14 alone.

1.1.3. The Council's funding package represents an uplift of over 25 per cent on previous years. Given the general trend for cuts in the current economic climate, this is a substantial investment which strongly demonstrates the Council's commitment to culture and arts.

1.2. General comments

1.2.1. The Council welcomes this opportunity to comment on the draft Ambitions for the Arts: A Five-year Strategic Plan for the Arts in Northern Ireland 2013–18 ('Five-year Plan').

1.2.2. The Council is already committed, through its Cultural Framework, to delivering on many of the ambitions identified under the Five-year Plan. Given the Council's investment, the number of arts organisations based in Belfast and clients shared with the Arts Council and the imminent transfer of functions under the Review of Public Administration, it is essential that the Arts Council and Belfast City Council work closely together to achieve their shared aims.

1.2.3. While we recognise that the strategy by its nature is top-line, we would like to see more published targets so that the success of the Five-year Plan can be monitored,



evaluated and reviewed. This may also more fully reflect the ambition that the Arts Council has for the sector over the next five years.

- 1.2.4. In some cases, it is not possible to ascertain how the ambitions, themes and targets set down in the Arts Council's Five-year Plan link together, and there appears to be some discrepancies.
- 1.2.5. We note that there are few actions to support the fifth pillar, the environment, in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL) corporate plan, and we would encourage further initiatives to support this. For example, in the Cultural Framework for Belfast, we commit to working with the wider public and private sector and championing art in the built environment. This will include meanwhile use of empty shop units, which we look forward to continuing to work with the Arts Council on, and the feasibility of a per cent for art scheme.
- 1.2.6. The Cultural Framework also contains plans for a joined-up public art strategy, and we would welcome the Arts Council's commitment to this, potentially encompassing the One City project.
- 1.2.7. We would note the vital role festivals, events and other activities play in regenerating physical space, making people feel safer, more welcome, engaged and included.
- 1.2.8. Finally, we would encourage the benefits of City of Culture and its Legacy Framework to be rolled out across NI and, in particular, in Belfast.

1.3. Ambitions

- 1.3.1. We welcome the Arts Council's ambition **to place high-quality arts projects within the grasp of socially excluded groups**. However, we would also request further definition of 'socially excluded'. The Council's priority and target groups are set down under the Inspiring communities theme of the Cultural Framework. They are: children and young people; older people; minority ethnic communities; disabled people; and people living in areas of deprivation.
- 1.3.2. We note the success of Test Drive the Arts, and welcome the Arts Voucher initiative. In our Cultural Framework for Belfast, we also have a highlighted a range of initiatives to 'inspire communities', such as a community ticketing scheme to encourage attendance at arts events by community groups. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Arts Council to jointly deliver these initiatives.
- 1.3.3. We would also draw your attention to the Council's resource of 22 community centres. These centres are usually in areas of disadvantage and are a vital tool for engaging communities and increasing access.
- 1.3.4. While the Council does not fund individual artists, we recognise the need to attract, nurture and retain artistic talent, and we welcome the Arts Council's commitment to **individual artists**. We would particularly welcome the opportunity to work with the Arts Council to place artists at the heart of local and international showcases, which is an action under the Cultural Framework's Distinctly Belfast theme.
- 1.3.5. We welcome the Arts Council's commitment to **core fund arts organisations**. As with the Arts Council, the Council has recently changed its funding contracts to multi-annual core funding, providing greater stability for organisations to programme excellence. Under the Cultural Framework's Strengthening the sector theme, we also commit to helping organisations diversify their income. However, it is important to recognise that arts organisations can seldom be self-sufficient, and the scope for diversifying income is not consistent across the sector.
- 1.3.6. While the ambition to attract more diverse audiences, especially those from disadvantaged communities, is laudable, it should also be noted that this is not the field of expertise or the remit of all organisations and may encourage tokenism.
- 1.3.7. We therefore consider that core funding should reflect the impressive audience development already achieved by organisations and recognise that nurturing and



retaining existing audiences is also vital. Culture and arts still lacks visibility in some arenas, and encouraging audiences as a whole is critical to the survival of the sector, including new capital developments.

- 1.3.8. We welcome the Arts Council's ambition to **help arts organisations deliver benefits to our community**. However, cognisant of the point raised under 1.3.6, we would require more clarity as to what is meant by 'delivery agreements' and would be concerned that the requirement of all funded organisations to place a strong focus on community engagement may put undue pressure on organisations, particularly if it is not backed up with additional investment.
- 1.3.9. We welcome the ambition to **build partnerships**. In particular, we would like to agree roles and responsibilities in relation to international arts market, including support for partnerships, touring and export.
- 1.3.10. We welcome the ambition to **support skills development**, which we share under the Cultural Framework's Strengthening the sector theme. In particular, we welcome support for apprenticeships and internships.
- 1.3.11. We welcome the ambition to **encourage voluntary activities in the arts**. The Council is also committed to promoting volunteering through both its Cultural Framework and the Community Development Strategy, and we would welcome the opportunity to further develop joined-up actions.

1.4. Theme One: Champion the Arts

- 1.4.1. The Council strongly agrees that the arts sector can make a compelling case for why the arts matters, and we welcome a partnership approach to advocacy. Advocacy is included in the Cultural Framework for Belfast, and we feel that the Arts Council's lead role in this, as evidenced by the response to the Comprehensive Spending Review, could be made stronger.
- 1.4.2. We welcome the target to **improve communication**. Improved communication with the general public, both existing and potential arts beneficiaries, is essential for retaining and growing audiences, and the Council is in the process of commissioning an Attracting audiences marketing plan. This will also ensure that the benefits of arts investment are widely known, creating advocacy for future support.
- 1.4.3. However, we note that digital media is the preferred mode of communication. It should be noted that this is not the preferred or most accessible mode of communication for all audiences and, in particular, may exclude some of the Arts Council's target communities.
- 1.4.4. While we welcome the idea of the Arts Mark in theory, more detail here would be advantageous, particularly the perceived long-term benefit of such a scheme.
- 1.4.5. The Council welcomes proposals for a **dedicated gallery**. As we understand it, the current proposal is for a disadvantaged area in the inner city, and we look forward to working with the Arts Council to explore sites and further develop this project.
- 1.4.6. While the Council is generally supportive of **honouring our artists**, we note the need to simultaneously continue to attract, nurture and retain new and upcoming artistic talent.
- 1.4.7. We would ask for further consideration of the arts in the international context and how international showcasing, export and touring can place Belfast specifically and NI generally on the world stage.
- 1.4.8. Furthermore, bringing international excellence to the city can engage new audiences, develop local talent and artists and showcase the city. Following on from the success of the MTV EMAs, 2012 Our Time, Our Place and City of Culture, the Council would like to see an ambition to bring a major cultural event to Belfast.



1.5. Theme Two: Promote Access

- 1.5.1. The Council strongly supports the Arts Council's aim to promote access to the arts, as reflected under the Cultural Framework's Inspiring communities and Attracting audiences themes.
- 1.5.2. In addition to our community centres, the Council has range of resources, such as leisure centres, parks, playing fields and other public realm sites, that encourage and enable people to be active in Belfast. Arts is one pathway to achieve this, and current initiatives include art in parks and a range of participation and outreach projects. We would welcome a closer working relationship with the Arts Council to maximise the mutual benefit of these resources.
- 1.5.3. We would welcome the opportunity to work with Arts Council and Audiences NI to develop a **framework to map arts attendance and identify audience 'cold spots'**. The Council has already taken steps to map this in partnership with Audiences NI. However, there is a need to ensure a robust framework for monitoring and evaluating audiences at free and non-ticketed events in order to build a complete picture.
- 1.5.4. We welcome the **Re-imaging Communities Programme** and request that Belfast be considered a priority based on socio-economic need.
- 1.5.5. In general, we welcome the proposal to increase arts activities in the **top 20 per cent most deprived Super Output Areas** (SOAs). People living in these areas are recognised as one of the Council's target hard-to-reach populations.
- 1.5.6. However, we are concerned that the proposal is to increase 'the proportion' of activity in these areas, which suggests that there is no additional funding to support these initiatives. It would be useful to know both the baseline figure and the target here. Regardless, this is likely to be to the detriment of populations, organisations and activities elsewhere in Belfast. In the least, there should be flexibility to programme in either the specified geographic areas or to run initiatives to attract people living in these areas, for example, a mobility scheme, ensuring that everyone has equal access to high-quality arts across the city.
- 1.5.7. The Council does not agree with the target to increase the proportion of arts activities delivered in rural areas across NI. The Five-year Plan should be cognisant of Belfast's unique position as the city is home to the majority of NI's arts organisations and two thirds of creative media and arts jobs. In particular, as 40 per cent of the most deprived SOAs are in urban Belfast, this dual prioritisation will be detrimental to organisations and activities in neither rural nor most-deprived areas such as in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter. Again, we would strongly encourage the Arts Council to consider activities that encourage people from rural areas to come in to urban centres of excellence.
- 1.5.8. We welcome the focus on **arts and older people**. Older people are a target audience under the Cultural Framework's Inspiring communities theme, and Belfast is in the process of become an Age-friendly City: an inclusive and accessible urban environment that promotes active ageing. Our arts are well-attended by the older people and initiatives, for example, in the Ulster Hall, have been particularly successful. We would welcome the opportunity to share our experiences and work more closely with the Arts Council.
- 1.5.9. We welcome the focus on **intercultural arts**. Minority ethnic communities are an identified priority under the Cultural Framework's Inspiring communities theme, and the contribution of cultural events and programmes to good relations is also recognised in our Good Relations Plan 2011–14. We would welcome the opportunity to work further with the Arts Council in this area.
- 1.5.10. We welcome the focus on **people with a disability**. Disabled people are an identified priority under the Cultural Framework's Inspiring communities theme, and we would welcome the opportunity to work further with the Arts Council in this area, particularly in relation to practical requirements to be undertaken by shared funded



clients, provided that such requirements are cognisant of the nature and variety of the organisations.

- 1.5.11. We welcome the focus on **arts and education**. Children and young people are a strategic priority of the Council and are identified as a target group under the Cultural Framework's Inspiring communities theme. We would draw your attention to the Council's Poverty and Inequalities in Belfast Framework, which was published in 2012, and research published in 2013 further indicated that Belfast has the second highest instance of child poverty in the UK. We would also highlight the Council's Youth Forum, which is made up of 36 young people, aged between 13 and 18, from a range of backgrounds and cultures. We would welcome the opportunity to work further with the Arts Council in this area.
- 1.5.12. We note the Arts Council's comments on the **review of public administration**, and welcome the proposed memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Belfast City Council and the Arts Council. Discussions around the MOU have already commenced, including proposals to jointly fund the Council's Flagship Fund, and we look forward to continuing this closer working relationship with the Arts Council.
- 1.5.13. However, we would request that the unique position of Belfast City Council is further clarified within the Five-year Plan. Furthermore, while the Five-year Plan notes the 'squeeze on local government finance', as detailed above, Belfast City Council has uniquely increased its investment in culture and arts.
- 1.5.14. We also note the proposal to measure outcomes, such as increased wellbeing, and to work with local government to measure the benefits of the arts through the adoption of a dashboard of indicators. The Council is also committed to monitoring, evaluating and communicating the quality and impact of the arts on the city. Working together to streamline research, monitoring and evaluation will avoid duplication and reduce unnecessary burden on the Arts Council, Belfast City Council and their funded clients. We would also be interested in the proposed changes to the RFO survey referred to on page 23 of the consultation document.
- 1.5.15. Finally, Belfast City Council has already developed a robust and extensive arts strategy for the city up to 2015. We welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the Arts Council to ensure the mutual success of our strategies, and look forward to revising the strategies in partnership in 2015.

1.6. Theme Three: Create a Resilient Sector

- 1.6.1. While this theme lacks detail, it appears to resonate with the Cultural Framework's Strengthening the sector theme, and we look forward to working more closely with the Arts Council in its development.
- 1.6.2. However, we again note the initiatives to strengthen the sector should be cognisant of the variety of the arts sector and should be appropriate to size, scale and genre.
- 1.6.3. We welcome support for **creative industries**, which is noted as a opportunity for income-generation and business development within the Cultural Framework. We will also be looking at ways in which arts organisations can avail of the Council's business development programmes.
- 1.6.4. Finally, the Council is an active member of the Eurocities network, including the Eurocities Cultural Forum, which offers a platform for learning, sharing and networking. We therefore look forward to working with the Arts Council to grow the drawdown of EU funding.

1.7. Art-form Strategies

- 1.7.1. While the Council supports the arts in general because of the impact it has on the city, we welcome the Arts Council's support for specific art forms and the intrinsic value of arts. However, we would like to see a greater emphasis on quality throughout the Five-year Plan. The Council believes that high-quality art has greatest



impact, and the Cultural Framework contains the aim 'Belfast will be internationally recognised for its cultural excellence'.

- 1.7.2. **Dance** is a small but vitally important sector within NI, as recognised by the Arts Council's prioritisation of the genre. We would also encourage the development of dance initiatives in Belfast.
- 1.7.3. We welcome the review of **literature** and would ask that the Council be recognised as a major stakeholder, particularly given work carried out to date by Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board under the Literary Belfast initiative.
- 1.7.4. While we welcome proposals for a **visual arts gallery**, we would also note that there is a need for additional high-quality and accessible studio space in Belfast and would request that this is included within the Five-year Plan. We would welcome working with the Arts Council to identify potential sites, including opportunities for regeneration, redevelopment and meanwhile use.
- 1.7.5. As the lead partner in music tourism, music product development and Belfast Music Week, the Council looks forward to continuing to work with the Arts Council on **music** initiatives, including a review of traditional music.
- 1.7.6. **Community arts** is strategically important to the Council, as reflected in the Cultural Framework's Inspiring communities theme, and the Council also has extensive experience of community development through its Community Services Department and its community centres. We would like the Council to be recognised as a major stakeholder, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Arts Council on the community arts review and strategy.
- 1.7.7. We welcome the Arts Council's focus on **youth arts**. Youth unemployment and suicide are both of particular concern to the Council, and we would welcome the opportunity to work together to further develop these initiatives.
- 1.7.8. We also note the proposal to roll out a quality indicators framework. The Council is also committed to monitoring, evaluating and communicating the quality and impact of the arts on the city and would welcome more joined-up working to reduce duplication and bureaucracy.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the proposals. I look forward to reading the feedback from the consultation process and the final strategy. If you require any further information in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

John McGrillen

Director of Development