

APPENDIX 2

Provisional Response (subject to Council ratification)

1.1 Belfast City Council's support for culture and arts

1.1.1 As the Arts Council (ACNI) is aware, Belfast City Council is strongly committed to supporting culture and arts in the city. The Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012 to 2020 sets out a vision for Belfast 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 2016 we committed over £5.8m to support the core costs of 56 culture, arts and heritage organisations in the city over a four-year period (2016-2020). Our investment over this period also included additional financial support of over £1m for high quality arts and heritage projects, as well as community festival awards (jointly financed by the Department for Communities).

1.1.3 We have also worked with the ACNI on a number of partnership projects. In 2014 we invested £900k in partnership with the ACNI on seven large-scale Creative and Cultural Belfast projects. These were big, bold, collaborative projects aimed at offering as many people as possible the opportunity to take part in high-quality cultural projects which were distinctly Belfast in character.

1.1.4 In 2017 we agreed to co-invest £600k over a period of three years with the ACNI in a Resilience Programme which aimed to tackle complex issues of sustainability in the context of a challenging funding environment.

1.1.5 In 2018 Council also secured £400k of EU funding for the delivery of our PEACE IV Creative Communities projects which are currently under development.

1.1.6 The points outlined above by no means represent a full picture of our levels of investment in the arts. Rather they offer a snapshot of the variety of investment and highlight in particular previous and on-going areas of collaboration with the ACNI. Overall, since the inception of our Cultural Framework for Belfast in 2012, Council has maintained levels of investment in cultural and arts.

1.1.7 In 2017 Council also took the decision to lead on a bid for the designation of European Capital of Culture in 2023. This decision demonstrates both commitment to the social value of culture-led transformation as well as an underlying commitment to the intrinsic value of the culture, arts and heritage sector to the cultural vitality of Belfast as a whole.

Although the competition was halted, Council has committed to the development of a new 10-year Cultural Strategy for Belfast and has recently undertaken its own far-reaching pre-consultation on the strategic priorities for culture in the city. The comments in this document are written both in the context of Council's on-going development of a new Cultural Strategy for Belfast and in the context of Belfast's position as a regional driver for culture in Northern Ireland. We believe that that the opportunity for strategic collaboration with the ACNI and other statutory and non-statutory bodies is timely. We welcome the opportunity to raise the ambition and deepen our understanding of what the requirements are for sectoral resilience at this critical juncture.

1.2 General comments on the consultation document

1.2.1 The Council welcomes this opportunity to comment on the draft five year strategic framework for developing the arts 2019–2024.

1.2.2 Council is already committed through its Cultural Framework for Belfast 2016-2020 and through its draft Cultural Strategy for Belfast 2020–2030 to delivering on many of the ambitions outlined in the draft five year strategic framework in a Belfast context.

1.2.3 We welcome the ACNI's Shared Vision as one that:

- *Celebrates arts and creativity*

- *Links us to a shared heritage of ideas, words and images*

- *Helps us to be connected, confident and outward looking (p.4)*

We note the complementarity of this vision with that of the Belfast Agenda which states that by 2035 Belfast will be:

[...] a city re-imagined, a great place to live for everyone [...] Beautiful, well-connected, culturally vibrant, it will be a city shared and loved by its people and admired around the world.

1.2.4 We welcome your statement that you will support local authorities in the delivery of Community Plans (p.6) and look forward to exploring a shared approach to this. We recognise our role as the city authority places Belfast in the unique position of being a regional driver for the rest of Northern Ireland in this respect.

- 1.2.5 We note that you feel the arts can make a meaningful contribution to the Draft Programme for Government outcomes 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10 (pg 6). We agree with this alignment and note that The Belfast Agenda will also broadly support these outcomes.

1.3 Ambitions/Priorities

- 1.3.1 We note what your document describes as a *simple* (p.7) approach to the stated guiding principles which are summarised by the words *Inspire, Connect, Lead*. We note that an accompanying business plan will be produced each year which will set out in detail the actions which the ACNI will take in order to deliver on your strategic objectives. As such, we note that your consultation document takes a high-level approach to the direction of travel for the ACNI over the forthcoming years. Council also notes that the consultation document refers on a number of occasions to the current atmosphere of uncertainty and short-term operational challenges which are being faced by the ACNI. Council wholly acknowledges that whilst we need to have cognisance of the local, regional and global challenges that we are all facing in terms of austerity, lack of central Government, budgetary cuts and on-going Brexit negotiations, that there is now perhaps a greater need than ever to look at long-term planning in order to ensure the cultural vibrancy of Belfast and the surrounding region reaches its full potential. We recognise that new ways of working and new models of investment are required in order to sustain and grow the cultural offer in twenty-first century cities. Belfast City Council's draft ten year Cultural Strategy will present a long-sighted view of cultural transformation with a review of the governance of arts investment at the heart of developing a new way of working. Belfast City Council is committed to further strengthening existing cultural infrastructure in the long-term whilst also tackling the challenges of investing in new projects. This will involve the evolution of a new understanding of the concept of resilience, an understanding which has flexibility, adaptability and sustainability at its centre. We acknowledge that in order to be successful in this, local governments must be able to take on different roles as leaders, financial supporters, advocates, facilitators and occasionally observers. We also believe that this new approach will involve developing new models of co-investment. Given the Council's investment in culture, the number of arts organisations based in Belfast (the majority of which have a regional or wider remit) and the shared portfolio of clients between the two organisations, it is essential that the ACNI and Belfast City Council work closely together to achieve shared aims. We regard the ACNI as a crucial investment partner with a leading role to play in co-ordinating collective action to ensure that a

holistic vision and approach for the arts is embedded across Belfast and Northern Ireland.

1.3.2 Council supports and welcomes the objectives and actions under all three principles and notes in particular the ACNI's *consideration of the reinstatement of multi-annual funding*, the objective to *transform the relationship with local government through partnership working* and the intention to work with Belfast City Council on *the development of a major city centre visitor attraction*. Council notes that Belfast was one of a number of pilot cities who took part in the recent Cultural Enquiry project as part of the UK Core Cities Network. One of the key recommendations coming out of the Cultural Enquiry which Council hopes to adopt for Belfast, is the establishment of an adaptable model called a City Compact which will support collective, co-ordinated action to grow and sustain the city's cultural ecosystem. This Cultural Compact will involve aligning activity and funding and leveraging additional human, financial and property resources in support of agreed local actions. It is intended that the Compact will be the primary vehicle for discussion between local partners and Government about how best to deploy culture and cultural resources for the city. Council believes that the ACNI must be a central partner in this scheme and looks forward to taking the next steps to developing a Cultural Compact for Belfast.

1.4 CONCLUSION

1.4.1 This five-year strategic framework is timely given Council's own current work on a proposed ten-year Cultural Strategy for Belfast 2020-2030. Our response has highlighted a number of areas where Council and the ACNI could work together with common purpose to meet the needs of the sector in the short and long term. We look forward to reading detailed yearly action plans which will enable the framework to be monitored, evaluated and reviewed.

We recognise that it is our role as the city authority to support Belfast's cultural infrastructure to appropriate levels. However, we strongly believe that the ACNI must also acknowledge and commit to supporting on-going levels of investment in cultural infrastructure in Belfast in order to maintain the city's critical status as a regional driver for Northern Ireland.