

Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Forum for Local Government & the Arts Response

The Forum for Local Government and the Arts, FLGA, is the representative body for the local government arts sector. The membership is comprised of the 26 district councils.

The FLGA urges the Executive to increase the amount of funding allocated to the arts in the draft budget to ensure the sustainability of the arts sector. The sector is already in crisis and the proposed allocation falls drastically short of the additional £26 million requested by the Arts Council to bring Northern Ireland into parity with the rest of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

The Arts Council has already informed local authorities that they are a low funding priority and it has closed its Multi-Annual Programme which provided funding to 13 district councils. This will have far reaching consequences across these district councils; arts organisation may be forced to close, jobs may be lost, and, over 25,000 people may be denied access to arts activities. This is a period of uncertainty for local government in light of the Review of Public Administration and there will be many budgetary pressures on district councils. Local Government contributed £19,833,550 to the arts in 2004/05 (Arts Council NI Local Authority Arts Expenditure Survey) and may not be in a position to fill any future shortfalls in Central Government funding.

Programme for Government

The FLGA supports the overarching aim of the Programme for Government to, *"build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life."*

However, the FLGA is concerned about the Executive's ability to meet several outlined key goals in light of the proposed allocation for the arts in the Draft Budget. One of the five priorities, *"Growing a dynamic innovative economy"* outlines two key goals which require investment in the arts; *"Growing the creative industries by up to 15% by 2011"* and *"Increasing the number of tourists visiting each year from 1.98m to 2.5m by 2011 and increasing revenue from £370m to £520m."* The FLGA believes that lack of investment in the arts will have a detrimental impact on the growth of the creative industries sector and on the ability to achieve this 15% growth target. The FLGA would also point out that the arts play a significant role in the rapidly growing tourist market by providing a wide range of cultural and entertainment activities for visitors, and would emphasise the fact that, cultural tourism is growing faster than the other tourist segments in Northern Ireland, engaging 224,000 visitors each year in cultural activities (NI Tourism Monitor 2004). Investment in the arts is vital to ensure that this growth continues.

The FLGA supports the intentions of Public Service Agreement 9, *"Promoting access to culture, arts and leisure"* and its two specific targets, *"By 2011 to increase by 3% the proportion of the population attending arts events"* and *"By 2011 to increase by 2% the proportion of the population participating at arts events."* However, it would stress the point that there needs to be increased investment in the arts to ensure high quality, innovative arts events for the population to attend. Without adequate funding for the arts sector to ensure the provision of arts events for the public it may prove difficult to achieve these targets.

Budget

Over the three years of the budget the arts sector will receive £6.75 million and, from this total amount, the Arts Council will receive only £4.25 million. This figure falls far short of the Arts Council's needs assessment of the sector which stated that an additional £26 million was required to ensure the sustainability of the arts. The FLGA is also concerned about the fluidity of the allocated figures for years two and three of the Draft Budget and the fact that they may be taken as planning figures only.

Investment Strategy

The FLGA supports the commitment to *"increased levels of investment and in our arts and culture infrastructure to enable us to keep pace with the artistic and cultural expectations of a modern society"* and the impact this will have on the new Lyric Theatre, the Old Museum Arts Centre and the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast. However, the intention to invest in new arts infrastructure needs to be followed by an investment in arts organisations and artists to ensure activity within the new buildings. There also needs to be a commitment to continue to fund established regional arts centres that have proven to be successful venues and cultural hubs for towns.

The FLGA reminds the Executive that the five main political parties recently gave their support to Private Members' Motion, calling on the Executive to, "raise the level of arts funding to at least the United Kingdom average within the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review." We would urge the Executive to increase the arts allocation in the Draft Budget to ensure the realisation of this Motion.

The arts economy in Northern Ireland is worth almost £30 million per annual, with over £12 million being generated annually in earned income. Every £1 of public money invested generates a return of £3.62 to the local economy. These figures prove the economic value of the arts and in light of the Executive's aim to grow the economy the FLGA would urge it to reconsider the arts allocation in the Draft Budget to ensure the future of the arts sector.