

Welcome...

Welcome to our "Election 2007" special edition newsletter in light of the elections on 7th March. The FLGA would like to say thank you to the five parties that contributed and we are delighted to see such strong advocacy for the arts at the party level.

It is clear that the arts are integral to quality of life, social integration, education and economic development and it bodes well that these key themes are recognised and highlighted at a political level. It is imperative in light of the Review of Public Administration that a focus on the arts remains at the heart of central and local government policy and the FLGA will continue its work to emphasize the vital role of the arts. The emphasis on Community Planning may provide opportunities for arts and culture to become embedded within any future community plans that are developed by the district councils.

The FLGA will like to offer its congratulations to the Arts Council NI on the launch of 'Creative Connections' a 5 year plan for developing the arts 2007- 2012. The strategy focused on 4 broad themes; promoting the value of the arts; strengthening the arts; growing audiences and increasing participation and improving our performance. Keeping Northern Ireland a 'cradle of creativity' and actively lobbying government for an increase in arts funding to £10 per person per year are on ACNI's agenda. ACNI are working in partnership with the 'Invest in Inspiration' lobbying group to help achieve this goal. Read more about the funding crisis in our 'Invest in the Arts' article.

I hope you enjoy our latest newsletter and we welcome any feedback or comments to, as always, help improve the quality of our communications.

Charlie Smyth, Newry & Mourne District Council, Chair FLGA

Creative Connections

The Arts Council has launched its new 5-year plan for the arts in Northern Ireland. The plan, entitled 'Creative Connections' is driven by a bold vision to place the arts at the heart of Northern Ireland's social, economic and creative life.

The strategic plan has been informed by the most comprehensive consultation process undertaken by the Arts Council. It establishes the framework that will enable artists and arts organisations to keep pace with the artistic and cultural expectations of a modern society and contribute fully to the re-generation of Northern Ireland. 'Creative Connections' builds on the successes of the Arts Council's previous plan, such as taking the highly successful Creative Youth Partnerships art programme beyond the school gates and into youth clubs and community centres in some of the most deprived areas of the country. It also introduces a series of new initiatives

that will support the development of cultural tourism, the creative industries, entrepreneurial skills for artists, and international showcase opportunities for artists and organisations.

Arts Council Chairman, Rosemary Kelly said:

"The arts are increasingly recognised as a catalyst for community development and regeneration of civic pride. Successful artists have the potential to make the world talk about Northern Ireland for all the right reasons and to promote an image of a confident and creative place in which to live, work and do business. Now is the time to build on what we have."

Delivering on this five year strategy will require Government to invest in arts and culture in Northern Ireland in a way which provides parity of treatment with other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland. The Arts Council is calling on Government to raise the per capita spend on the arts in Northern Ireland from £6.13 to £10. This request has the widespread support of the arts sector, which is mounting a parallel campaign for additional arts funding.



What the Arts Mean to...**DUP**

The DUP has been particularly involved in recent years around helping promote many cultural activities, particularly those aspects which are very important to the unionist community.

The rediscovery and revival of Ulster-Scots culture and language has been developing over recent years. For many years the Ulster-Scots language was thought of as 'poor English' but it is now recognised as a language in its own right. We have been lobbying to see the levels of funding given to Ulster-Scots language and culture increased because whilst Irish language and culture has been very well provided for in Northern Ireland there has not been a similar level of support provided for Ulster Scots.

The media image surrounding many Loyal Order and other parades in Northern Ireland has not always been a good one in recent years, but it is clear that these are some of the most significant cultural events which take place in Northern Ireland every year. Whilst we wish to ensure that the right to parade is upheld there have been some developments around parades in order to help develop them further as cultural festivals.

The first example of this was the Maiden City Festival in Londonderry which not only helped celebrate many of the events surrounding the siege, but also helped explain their cultural significance to many people who would not otherwise have had an opportunity to gain a knowledge of these events and an understanding of their historical significance. The DUP understands that parading is likely to be a contentious area, but if we are to help build a more peaceful society then it is important that tolerance and respect is developed. That is why we as a party lobbied for funding in order to help develop the Belfast 12th July parade as a festival event.

The arts in Northern Ireland have been under funded for many years and often have not received the recognition which they deserve. The arts has played, and will continue to play a key role in the development of Northern Ireland both economically and culturally. The arts can help sell Northern Ireland to a wider audience both as a destination to visit and to do business. It is important that there is a long-term strategy in order to develop the arts in a coherent manner and one which can draw different elements in order to make the most of the varied sectors and to give the arts in Northern Ireland a meaningful place at the centre of society.

What the Arts Mean to...**Sinn Féin**

Enhancing the Quality of Life through Support for the Arts and Culture.

Arts and culture generally enhance our quality of life. Community arts in particular promote development, social inclusion and foster local identity. Sinn Féin believes that arts and culture are essential, not an optional extra.

Apart from their intrinsic social value, they also have the capacity to significantly enhance the Six Counties economy, driving local economic regeneration and the tourism sector in particular. Arts and culture therefore provide both a social and an economic return on public investment. Yet currently there is a crisis in the arts as a result of systematic under-funding. It is estimated that public funding of the arts is the lowest of any comparable region in these islands. Current per capita spend on the arts in the Six Counties is £6.13 – under half the spend in the 26 Counties which stands at £12.46 and in itself is not nearly high enough.

While we recognise that there is much that needs to be done to better support arts and culture in the Six Counties, in our view the matter of greatest urgency in arts policy at present is the need to end the funding deficit and restructure the arts budget. Sinn Féin is committed to this.

To advance this priority, Sinn Féin in Government will work to:

- End the funding crisis in arts and culture and reach a minimum investment target of 1% total budgetary spend.
- Devote significant support to cooperatively-run and community arts projects including community festivals, and particularly those that innovate to actively promote social inclusion and oppose sectarianism and racism.
- Ensure that funding allocation is not discriminatory but fully inclusive, actively and equally promoting not only Irish culture including Irish language arts, but also participation by new communities and a comprehensive disability arts programme.
- Actively promote the Six Counties as a cultural visitor destination within an all-Ireland framework.
- Establish a Gaeltacht Quarter in Belfast.

What the Arts Mean to...UUP

We enjoy a vibrant local arts scene. The Belfast Festival at Queens, the Lyric Theatre and the newly improved Opera House act as major international showcases for our local talent.

Yet public investment on arts and culture dropped £1 million between 2004 and 2006. Expenditure was reduced to just over £6 per head of population, which is considerably less than the rest of the UK. The irony is that for every pound spent by the Arts Council, over £3 is returned back into the local economy. This makes supporting the Council not only a culturally but a financially sound decision. However, a lot more investment needs to be put into supporting our arts and heritage. Redevelopment of the Lyric Theatre, the Crescent Arts and the arts centre in the Cathedral Quarter (which would incorporate Old Arts Theatre) were all part of the devolved government's programme for investment some years ago. But we are still awaiting further work on these.

We want to see a strong DCAL raising up the local arts scene. With the right resources targeted and in place, DCAL, in partnership with the Arts Council, can take forward arts strategies on a regional and local basis.

It's vital that the promotion of the arts lies at the heart of local government. Local government is closest to community groups and amateur organisations – and so can respond quickest to

local need. Also on a local level, we support library services and hope to encourage more use of these facilities to promote community regeneration. That means creating library-based IT hubs that can open up pathways to employment.

We have shared cultural traditions. Ulster Scots is enjoying considerable interest, as is Irish and the Ulster-British tradition. Peace has brought prosperity and this has brought an influx of peoples to Northern Ireland. They are to be welcomed – the diversity of international customs contributes to a strong, vibrant community and economy. For example, the Chinese community has made a hugely important contribution, as have Indian communities. Now we are seeing new immigrants from Eastern Europe and Portugal who are playing their part. It all bodes well for the future.

Moving image art is also significant. When DCAL was run locally we saw major investment in the NI Film & Television Commission. The work within the commission offers huge opportunities for our local talent and, when you add in the digital content sector, we're looking at a four-fold return on investment. Another key area is BBC and UTV procurement policy. Our broadcast media must source and bring in talent from Northern Ireland.

Everyone has talents, and arts and culture plays a very important role in ensuring individuals can realise their innate abilities. Developing those opportunities lies at the heart of Ulster Unionist policy.

What the Arts Mean to...SDLP

Under direct rule, culture, arts and leisure projects have been neglected. The Arts Council receives significantly less money proportionately than those in England, Scotland and Wales and, consequently, has been limited in the support it can offer the sectors it serves and in the initiatives it can take.

The SDLP recognise that cultural and leisure activities have much to offer our society in its struggle for a shared future, with richly developed young people and a strong sense of community. We will develop all aspects of Irish cultural life, island-wide. We recognise that investment in leisure opportunities leads to improvements in lifestyle and diet, and as such merits government support.

We believe significant gains could be made by emulating the cultural strategies adopted by successive Dublin governments, but there would be even more value in improving co-operation between North and South on cultural issues.

We have proved our capacity to negotiate this by successfully lobbying for increased funding to the Sports Council and the Northern Ireland Events Company.

A thriving Arts landscape offers the chance to enrich and educate, to share and discover. Ireland has a proud artistic history, which we will respect and further by fostering local talent, to in turn give back to communities what they deserve. The SDLP believes there should be greater recognition of amateur drama; the valuable and widely enjoyed contribution of groups across the North is almost completely unaided by government. Through drama, groups have found an important forum in which to exchange and come to terms with a diverse range of religious, political and many other views. We would like to see a re-examination of this sector, with particular consideration of funding opportunities.

Equality and inclusion are at the core of our values, and we recognise the role sport and leisure have to play in making these our reality, as well as the valuable and sorely needed health benefits they offer. Sport is too big economically, too important politically and too influential in shaping people's lives not to be taken seriously and treated equitably alongside other cultural activities. Sport must therefore be central in the development of the cultural/creative industries in the North.

What the Arts Mean to...Alliance

The promotion of arts, culture and heritage is integral to the quality of life of every citizen, the healing of our community divisions and the regeneration of our society. The arts are uniquely placed to celebrate Northern Ireland's rich and varied heritage, vibrant creative life and cultural distinctiveness. The arts can help explore and heal past and current conflicts, build community self-esteem and aid economic development.

We also believe that the arts can play an important role in the development of an image of Northern Ireland that is open and progressive. They can act as a creative and economic force for change towards the building of a vibrant and progressive integrated society.

Arts, culture and heritage cover a large range of forms and activities including visual arts, music, drama, literature, museums, language, dance, film, architecture and crafts. The cultural sector now also embraces new technology, working with video, the internet and digital imaging. This diversity of practice presents fresh challenges for audiences and artists.

We believe that arts and culture are central to any effective strategy on social inclusion. We would like to see increased funding for arts organisations to ensure they can deliver quality training, ensuring genuine empowerment for those taking part.

We encourage appreciation of and participation in the arts across all sections of the community, in particular people who may have been marginalised in the past – young people, migrants, women, those in economically deprived areas, in rural areas, people with disabilities and older people. There must be improved access to arts facilities for people with visual impairment, people who are blind and people with physical disabilities or learning difficulties. We support a system of reductions for unemployed people, students and pensioners.

There is a real need to building a strong national arts infrastructure across Northern Ireland in partnership with statutory, voluntary and private bodies, particularly following the Review of Public Administration. Co-operation and co-ordination between the Arts Council and other bodies regarding

joint goals and the effective input from different partners will assist efficient use of resources. We are also in favour of North/South strategies to help boost the arts and we believe that such links will benefit the arts community and tourism in Northern Ireland.

We would also like to expand the role of the private sector sponsorship of the arts, but as additional rather than replacement funding. We would encourage the expansion of the work being done by Arts and Business sponsorship and would like the Assembly to examine the idea of a per cent art scheme, as in the South of Ireland. Under this scheme 2-3% of new build projects are fed into the development of new arts buildings and the commissioning of new public art.

The future of the Belfast Festival at Queens must be secured, as part of an overall strategy for festivals, including West Belfast festival, Film Festival, Cinemagic, Drama, and Cathedral Quarter Festivals. We will lobby for adequate funding for festivals which enrich the lives of their audiences, as well as encouraging tourism and the local economy.

Arts and creative culture have a large role in encouraging and promoting lifelong learning. We support the ongoing work of the Arts Council in promoting the arts in schools, colleges, adult education centres and Council amenities. Alliance encourages the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, examinations and Assessment (NICCEA) Review to give the arts a more central place in the schools' curriculum, including the creative use of IT.

If we are to make Northern Ireland a prosperous, diverse and vibrant place which can attract business and tourism, we must strengthen the arts sector as it can play a pivotal role in our regeneration. At the centre of artistic production are individual artists. Alliance recognises the ongoing work of ACNI in supporting individual artists and would encourage the production of innovative and challenging work from artists.

Alliance will encourage investment in the arts: the cultural sector in Northern Ireland has the potential of rapid expansion and of playing a significant role in social and economic development.

'Invest in the Arts'

The Arts Council is working in partnership with 'Invest in Inspiration' the arts sector lobbying campaign to call for increased funding for the arts. The sector is facing a funding crisis that threatens the future of many of Northern Ireland's most valued cultural institutions, events and projects.

Arts funding in Northern Ireland has traditionally lagged behind England,

Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Currently Northern Ireland invests £6.13 per head of population in stark comparison to England (£8.39); Wales (£9.17); Scotland (£11.93) and the Republic of Ireland (£12.61). While these other regions have enjoyed substantial increases in their arts spending, Northern Ireland is investing less and less each year on cultural activity.

The situation will be exacerbated further as a predicted fall in Lottery monies will result in resources for the arts becoming even scarcer.

This chronic under funding puts Northern Ireland at a distinct disadvantage in comparison the rest of UK and Republic of Ireland. The region faces the prospect of an artistic "brain drain" as our brightest talents are forced to travel to Edinburgh,

Dublin or London and hampers efforts to tap into the lucrative cultural tourism market.

The funding crisis cuts across all art forms and all aspects of the arts. It is vital that the arts sector unites to oppose these cuts and spell out the contribution that the arts have made to Northern Ireland society.

The FLGA are represented on the steering committee for 'Invest in Inspiration' and it offers it's full support to the lobbying campaign.

For further information please log onto the Community Arts Forum website at www.caf.ie