



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

UK City of Culture 2013: DCAL Briefing

21 June 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Ms Joanna McConway Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Chairperson: We welcome Joanna McConway, who is head of arts branch. She has been temporarily assigned to the UK City of Culture team. I invite you to make an opening statement, and then we will follow that up with questions from members.

Ms Joanna McConway (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Thanks for having me this morning. I am here to give you some background to and an update on the City of Culture project and the Department's involvement with it. As most of you know, my usual role is head of arts branch in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) with responsibility for NI Screen and the Arts Council. However, for the past 12 months or so, I have also been working very closely with Derry City Council and the Culture Company in Derry to explore how the project aligns with DCAL's priorities. Since March, I have been working full-time on the project. That explains why you have not seen me since about February.

There are a couple of different elements to the City of Culture project. The cultural programme of events is the part that is being developed by the Culture Company and which DCAL has committed funding to. Another element is the involvement of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department for Social Development (DSD) in providing venues and capital infrastructure in the city. Although some of the venues are really critical to the City of Culture project because they will host some of the events, they are not part of my remit or the Executive's £12.6 million budget commitment to the City of Culture's cultural programme, which is the suite of events.

I will give an overview of the cultural programme. The Culture Company developed a cultural programme in response to the criteria set out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as part of the competition to award the UK City of Culture. The criteria include delivering a high-quality programme to realise social regeneration, positive economic impacts and a lasting legacy. From that,

the Culture Company and the partners in Derry have developed a set of targets that are SMART — specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

The targets include increasing employment and wages — that target goes right up to 2020, but there are milestones for 2013 and 2014 — and realising significant numbers of visitors and visitor spend in the city during 2013. The targets also focus on the need to use the City of Culture as a vehicle to tackle deprivation and social cohesion in the city. So, there are targets specifically for increasing the number of people from the city's most deprived wards who attend the arts and for delivering significant improvements in community relations, in perceptions of the city, and in equality and social cohesion.

Delivery of a lasting legacy is deeply embedded in the Cultural Company's ethos. There is a real focus on children and young people, which is very evident from the suite of events as there are a lot of partnerships with schools and youth groups.

The programme also concentrates on the diaspora, that is, the people who have left the city, and how they can be reconnected to it, particularly to bring future investment and development. The cultural programme also includes opportunities for purposeful enquiry into our past to inform the approach to its future. That will provide an important first step to future commemorative events that the Department has planned.

There are 140 lines of events and groups of events in the cultural programme. Some of those are concerts, so a simple event that takes up one line. Others are community projects that may include dozens of projects in one line. So, there will be a lot more than 140 individual events over the year; in fact, there will be hundreds. Some of them will be open to the public, some will be community based, and so on.

All the events fall into two categories. There are the big, bold visitor-attracting events, such as the Turner Prize, which will leave London for the first time, and the All-Ireland Fleadh, which is coming north for the first time. There are also international singers, dancers and other artists coming from all over the world, which will draw the attention of the world.

The other element is community activity. Cultural strategies, involving hundreds of small projects, are being developed across the city. The Shantallow and Waterside communities already have well-developed cultural strategies. They will inform interventions, so there may be a raft of projects that sit under those cultural strategies that will help build social cohesion and skills, but they will also ensure that there is buy-in from everyone across the city and, I should say, the surrounding region, because it is obviously not confined to the city.

The proposed outcomes from the City of Culture align well with DCAL's high-level aims and objectives. So, it was appropriate that we considered funding the project, in the context that one of the city's strengths, which I believe helped it win the bid, is its excellent arts infrastructure — theatres such as the Playhouse in the Waterside, the Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin Irish centre and the city's exciting public art. DCAL helped build a lot of those things. The Department was involved in a lot of the refurbishment projects in the previous Programme for Government period. So, we have this continued commitment through the Department and the Arts Council to keep supporting that cultural offering and to build that capacity in the city to make sure that the impact of those venues and their content keeps increasing audiences and attracting international events and partner organisations.

The business case for the cultural programme included a detailed assessment of need, which considered the context of the existing infrastructure and our commitment as well as the area's current socio-economic profile. That allowed us to assess the level of need that exists for government intervention to bring about regeneration. The business case explored the role that investment in the arts plays in culture, how it can contribute towards regeneration and the specific elements of the project that required support. Through examining the existing needs, drivers and gaps in cultural and tourism provision, the Department also reviewed the broader impact that the programme could have on the region as a whole. The Department's role in supporting the creative industries and how the City of Culture aligns with its objectives for the creative industries were also considered. The business case benchmarked against European cities of culture, specifically Liverpool, Cork and Glasgow, to look at the numbers and amounts of money that could be brought in and the scale of visitor numbers that we can expect.

All of that assessment highlighted that hosting a large-scale cultural event, such as City of Culture, can deliver for urban areas significant benefits in economic gains, social benefits and cultural legacy, with potential longer-term benefits after the initial event leading, ultimately, to culturally led

regeneration. The business case concluded that support for City of Culture is in line with the Executive and DCAL's high-level objectives; that it provides an opportunity to see significant benefits; and, therefore, funding should be made available over this year and next — the 2012-13 and 2013-14 financial years.

The business case, including an accountability and governance framework that was being developed up until a few weeks ago, has been approved by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). In April, the Executive agreed to provide DCAL with an additional funding amount of £12.6 million for the cultural programmes. That is in addition to our existing baseline.

The allocation will include a contribution towards marketing of the City of Culture, and we have made an allocation of up to £1.6 million from the £12.6 million for that. The £12.6 million also includes an optimism bias of up to £2 million. It is a bit like a contingency fund, but it is subject to additional approval and it is only for unforeseen costs: things that the Culture Company and Derry City Council cannot foresee at the minute, but that may require spending in the future. The example in the context of capital projects would generally be when legislation changes and something that comes up that could not be foreseen in the original business case. That is there for emergency purposes, as it were.

Now that that level of funding has been agreed and the outcomes that we expect to see in return for it are clear, the next step is to issue a formal letter of offer that will set out the conditions of funding. That has been developed and is just going through the final look-over by legal advisers at the moment.

The Culture Company launched highlights of the programme earlier this month. It expects to release the full and final programme in the autumn. Obviously, there are a lot of negotiations going on with artists and particularly a lot of the smaller projects with the communities that are still in development. The highlights launch showcased Ben Kelly from 'The Voice'; Phil Coulter; and Philip King from the 'Other Voices' project. That is a little project from Dingle that is a little bit like the Jools Holland show — they have acts in a tiny church in Dingle. They are going to do a concert in partnership with the Culture Company. The highlights launch also confirmed dates for the All-Ireland Fleadh and the hosting of the Turner Prize next year.

It also importantly provided some tasters of community-based work with local people and schools. DCAL has high-level targets for increasing participation and attendance at the arts, and those big events that I talked about will certainly do that, but I think that, as a ministerial priority and the legacy drive that the City of Culture will have, the community-based projects are some of the most important. I have some copies of a booklet called the 'Learning Curve' which the Culture Company has produced. I will leave them with the Committee Clerk for members.

There are also projects such as the Music Promise, which is going to deliver music classes to every child in the city, and Portrait of a City, which is a history project where people will do a lot of work in thinking about their history, recording it and looking at photographs from around the city. There is some really lovely information in there on those projects, and I think that they really capture the spirit of what City of Culture is all about. I am happy to take any questions you might have.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Joanna. Who is covering for you when you are working full-time on this project?

Ms McConway: My very capable and knowledgeable colleague, Gerard Murray, who is an arts branch team member, is acting in my post at the moment.

The Chairperson: How long is "temporary"; is it until the end of the project?

Ms McConway: The deployment was on a temporary basis until we got the business case and the letter of offer developed, so, at the moment, my deployment is due to finish at the end of July. However, I suspect that we probably will continue it further into the year so that I can act as project sponsor to embed a lot of the management and monitoring processes that are involved. This is a very significant amount of money and there are quite significant governance requirements that someone will need to help the Culture Company and Derry City Council with.

The Chairperson: You said that the optimism bias that has been included within the £12.6 million is there for emergency purposes only. Can we be assured that no further requests for funding will come forward?

Ms McConway: Normally, you would not build an optimism bias into a resource-based project. They are generally reserved for capital projects, but on looking at the benchmarking with other cities of culture, we decided that it was best for this project to have that flexibility. It is subject to further approvals, but, yes, it means that it is very unlikely that we would come back to the Executive with additional funding requirements.

The Chairperson: What outstanding issues still have to be resolved before the final letter of offer is forwarded?

Ms McConway: We do not have any particular sticking points. It is just that our letter of offer will be to Derry City Council because it is the owner of the Culture Company. Legal advisers are looking over the wording and so on, but there are no issues. We have put in place a management and monitoring section, which was submitted to DFP quite recently, and that was developed in partnership with Derry City Council. It is quite happy about the arrangements.

Mr Hilditch: I am surprised that the optimum bias figure has been put in the figures at this stage. The sponsorship is £2.5 million; do you have any further detail on that? We know the difficulty with events in the private sector that cannot crack that at the minute. How firm is the partnership?

Ms McConway: It is a challenging target, but the Culture Company has looked very carefully at what it believes it can achieve and the level of partnership that it can generate. As I mentioned in the opening statement, one of the key areas for the Culture Company's focus is the diaspora, meaning people from Derry or Northern Ireland who have moved away and who it wants to tap into to invest back in their home, as it were. It is a challenging target, but a lot of events and activities are planned to make sure that it does its best to achieve that. It has a full-time sponsorship manager who deals with corporate clients and with people from Londonderry who want to invest something back into the city.

Mr Swann: Thanks, Joanna. You touched on the legacy of the UK City of Culture. A recent report showed that £4.7 million, I think it was, will be used for the construction of a temporary facility. Is that the best use of that amount of money? I am sure there are enough buildings throughout Londonderry that can be brought back into use as part of that provision.

Ms McConway: I qualify what I say by noting that that is a DSD project, and DSD is involved in providing a good deal of permanent infrastructure in the city. A significant capital works project is ongoing, and that investment is in, as you say, a temporary venue for hosting events during 2013. The legacy of the structure will not be there, but the legacy of what the structure can be used for will remain. It will be sited at Ebrington and will provide an additional space to the outdoor Ebrington square, and the Vital Venue, as it is referred to, will be an indoor space that can be used for major events, and over 100 are already planned to be held in it during 2013. When Marty Melarkey, who is the programmer on the community side of the cultural programme, is developing projects with community groups, it will give them an opportunity to showcase what they are doing in a major venue. So, that has a legacy, too, when you bring groups together to put on show something that they have developed that means something to them and will have a lasting legacy for them.

Mr Swann: In June monitoring, there was a bid for £7.7 million to DFP. The Minister has reduced that to £6.5 million, but the overall spend remains at £12.6 million. Where did that balance of £1.27 million come from?

Ms McConway: It took us a little while to get to a final figure on the profile because there are a lot of competing considerations to balance. We wanted to be very sure that the government funding would not be lost if there was any slippage. It is not that there was a change in the spend for 2012-13, but the change was in agreeing with Derry City Council how to balance other funding that is coming in and may have more flexibility. We expect the Culture Company to have a significant amount of sponsorship and ticket income because events will happen in October and at the beginning of January 2013. That money is much more flexible than government funding. We therefore thought that it was better to have a lower profile from DCAL in the first year and, if they need additional money, they can use some of that more flexible funding. Does that make sense?

Mr Swann: So, the £1.27 million comes from ticket sales and sponsorship. Is that right?

Ms McConway: Well, I think they will probably spend more than £7.7 million in 2012-13. I think that they are probably going to spend something in the region of £8 million when you take marketing spend into account as well.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thanks, Joanne. As the only member here whose constituency covers part of the Derry City Council area, I am hugely interested in, and have been very supportive of, the City of Culture in Derry. I was at the highlights event at a packed St Columb's Hall, and it was very exciting.

Over the past number of months, I have engaged with the Culture Company and with Derry City Council, and have seen the potential. We see the inaugural report today containing predictions of 1,300 jobs and £500,000 spend. The only thing that gives me a bit of concern is that the anchor event for next year is Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in terms of spend, visitor numbers and what have you. Knowing Derry very well, as I do, I am still concerned about the ability to deal with the accommodation and everything else for that. Although I have engaged with the Culture Company and Derry City Council, has that been the story across the region and across the other local government areas? How much engagement has there been with the accommodation and hospitality providers in the likes of Strabane, Donegal, Limavady and even Coleraine? I think the entire north-west region will benefit from the City of Culture 2013. How much is actually happening on the ground there?

Ms McConway: The fleadh certainly does seem to be a huge draw for visitors, not just from across Northern Ireland but from overseas. I expect that it will be a very significant event. That is happening in August next year. Accommodation is an issue that has come up time and again, particularly from people around the city, who are aware that accommodation and infrastructure there may not be primed for such a huge event. You may be talking about 250,000 or more visitors in the space of 10 days. We have had estimates of right up to 400,000 over the period.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that Derry City Council has an infrastructure group, which is chaired by one of its engineers. I have attended it and have been really impressed with the work that it has done. It has undertaken an accommodation audit, which has looked primarily at the accommodation that is available in the city, but has also made an assessment of what accommodation is needed, not just for the fleadh but for other events happening throughout 2013. It is not just a matter of saying that we need 400,000 bed-nights because we will have that many people. You also need to make an assessment of how many of those people want to stay in hotels, how many want to camp — a lot will want to camp during the fleadh — how many will want to drive into the city, and how many will come by public transport. The group has looked at all of those and is working very closely with accommodation providers, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and other local councils and district areas to look at solutions to that. So it is definitely very much in hand. It is certainly not the case that it has not been dealt with. It is just that we may not have seen the out-turns of it yet.

Mr Ó hOisín: Are other local authorities buying into it because of the potential tourism benefits?

Ms McConway: My understanding is that, on the face of it, they are. Particularly in the Limavady and Dungiven areas, there are obviously quite a lot of link-in events that will happen through 2013, where they are well able to look at the different types of accommodation needs for large crowds.

Mr Ó hOisín: The only other concern is the number of standalone events. We are having the Fleadh Cheoil, the GAA congress is happening, and the Turner Prize, obviously. There are a limited number of standalone events. In other words, they are being organised by the outside bodies. What is the proposed mix and share there, without anticipating the final programme?

Ms McConway: Do you mean events that are delivered by the Culture Company as opposed to delivered by third parties?

Mr Ó hOisín: Yes.

Ms McConway: I think it is around a 60:40 split. Quite a lot of things will be delivered by third parties and facilitated by the Culture Company. Equally, a lot of events — those delivered directly by the Culture Company and those delivered through third parties, particularly at community level — are new ideas that have come specifically from the Culture Company as new interventions. Remember, third parties might include the Tate in London, for the Turner Prize, and, at the other end of the spectrum, community organisations.

Mr Ó hOisín: I have just one final question. Do you expect the final programme to be together by October?

Ms McConway: Absolutely. The run-up to 2013 will really begin in the autumn, around October. That is the time that the Culture Company will be getting together full booklets so people can start putting dates in diaries.

The Chairperson: Joanna, an incredible number of people are involved in the delivery of the project. Clearly, that is a risk. What other risks have you identified as part of the project?

Ms McConway: As part of the governance framework, one thing we are going to be working on are the risks as they come up. There are some generic risks. This is a major undertaking with a new company that does not have track record. We have satisfied ourselves on some of those risks. For example, we are satisfied with the Culture Company's capacity, given the cultural leadership that the people employed in the company display. Others will be ongoing risks. For instance, there is talk of burnout, from people attending events in 2012. So much is happening here at the moment, with the golf, and the Giant's Causeway centre, and we have the World Police and Fire Games coming next year. A year-long period of events is great for people locally. However, it might be more difficult to get someone coming from overseas to commit, if they have already come to Northern Ireland in 2012 for, say, the Titanic events. We are very conscious of those things. With this type of project, it is going to be very much a live risk register. We expect risks to keep developing as issues arise, as they will when developing a major festival programme. That includes the risks involved in dealing with artists or security or infrastructure, which maybe we do not foresee at the moment. That is being actively managed.

The Chairperson: One final question: has the governance and accountability framework been approved yet by DFP?

Ms McConway: It has just been signed off by DFP. That has been finalised now.

The Chairperson: And DFP is content that it is robust?

Ms McConway: Well, it is DFP, so yes.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for coming this morning. We will see you again soon.