



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working-
class Communities: Belfast City Council

13 November 2014

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Gordon Dunne (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Ms Eimear Henry	Belfast City Council
Mr Brian Johnston	Belfast City Council

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): Brian and Eimear, you are very welcome. You are here on behalf of Belfast City Council, and we appreciate you coming along. Maybe you can talk about tourism as well. A lot of us have an interest in it, although that is not for this Committee. We appreciate that you have taken time out to come here. Brian, I take it that you are leading off for us on the presentation.

Mr Brian Johnston (Belfast City Council): Thanks for the opportunity to come to speak today. My expertise is more in tourism than in culture and arts, so Eimear will lead the presentation. We will then jointly answer the questions, if that is OK.

Ms Eimear Henry (Belfast City Council): I will give an overview of where culture and arts sits in our wider council and of some of the specific initiatives on which we have been moving forward in recent years in council. Belfast is a dynamic, diverse and unique city, and having a dynamic, diverse and unique culture is vital to our success. Culture, arts and heritage create wealth by supporting jobs, attracting visitors and increasing economic investment. They improve our quality of life by creating a shared, welcoming and proud city. Our corporate vision is that the council, working with communities and stakeholders, takes a lead role in improving the quality of life now and for future generations for the people of Belfast and by making the city and its neighbourhoods better places to live in, work in, invest in, study in and visit. The development of the city's culture and arts is central to this vision and is at the heart of our overarching plans for Belfast's future. Broadly speaking, culture is the impact that people have on one another and on the environment that they live in. Culture also helps to distinguish between individuals, groups and societies. For the purpose of developing our cultural policy in council, culture is defined as the quality that makes Belfast distinctive, as represented through arts and heritage. In October 2012, we launched a new cultural framework for the city, which sets out our priorities for action and funding.

The Committee Clerk: We have lost our quorum. Unfortunately, we have to suspend as we have only three members. I will suspend the meeting very briefly while we retrieve a fourth member.

The Committee suspended at 11.31 am and resumed at 11.32 am.

On resuming —

Ms Henry: Our vision for culture in the city 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 by enriching quality of life and creating wealth, and the city's culture and creativity are renowned throughout the world. The framework was developed following extensive consultation with the sector and other stakeholders, and it has been positively received to date.

Actions in the culture framework are arranged under four key themes. First is distinctly Belfast. This theme is about creating and supporting high-quality art that reflects Belfast's unique character and that is culturally relevant and resonates with our residents, their interests and tastes, and that attracts and nurtures artistic talent.

Next is inspiring communities. When we were developing the strategy, members and other stakeholders told us that the people of Belfast must be at its heart and that everyone in the city must have the opportunity to engage with high-quality arts. However, some people in communities are harder to reach than others and are less likely to engage with the arts, and we accept this. The theme is about providing opportunities for and removing barriers to participation, including among priority groups such as young people, older people, disabled people, minority ethnic communities and people living in areas of disadvantage.

Our third theme is attracting audiences. One of the most critical challenges for the cultural sector is to engage with, retain and develop new audiences. This theme aims to increase local and visiting audiences for the arts and promote Belfast as a dynamic, creative and cultural city.

Finally, the fourth theme is strengthening the sector. The market alone will never wholly support the arts sector, which is one of the reasons why it relies on our public subsidy. However, the sector is peopled with enthusiastic and inventive fundraisers who work hard to sustain and grow their businesses. This theme is about working with them to share knowledge, expertise and opportunities to diversify their income streams.

What do we hope this will achieve? We hope that participants will have an increased sense of community and civic pride. We hope that participants will have an increased understanding of other cultures and communities, that Belfast will be more engaged and active as a city, that everyone in Belfast will be aware of Belfast's diverse culture, arts and heritage on offer and that we will have a strong arts and heritage infrastructure. The framework makes clear that the council funds the arts because they improve quality of life and have an economic dividend, making Belfast a better, more prosperous and successful city to live in, work in and visit. However, this comes with the recognition of both the instrumental and intrinsic benefits of the arts.

The council considers that high-quality arts are likely to have a greater impact when it is reflected in our core values of quality and equality, and is embedded in our funding processes. Different arts organisations have different aims, priorities and areas of expertise, creating a strong arts sector. Our funding encourages organisations to work to their strengths, whether that is inspiring communities, attracting audiences or strengthening the sector, rather than taking a blanket approach that requires all arts organisations to address all agendas.

What do we fund? The Belfast tourism, culture and arts unit invests in the arts through three main funding schemes. We have core multi-annual funding, which supports 52 organisations in the city with support for the core programmes of their activities over a three-year period; we have project funding, which provides up to £10,000 per organisation per year to one-off Belfast-based activities; and, with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, we administer the community festivals fund, which provides up to £10,000 per community festival. In 2013-14, the sector benefited from an increase of 25% in our funding to the cultural sector, bringing our investment to £4.5 million over three years. This funding currently attracts an average annual audience of four million people, 140,000 participants, 300 full-time jobs, 130 part-time posts and 4,000 artist contracts. However, all council funding schemes are oversubscribed, and only one third of applications for project and community festivals funding are successful. The amount of funding requested is almost five times what we have to give out.

We recognise that we must continue to work to increase access to the arts. While this is a key criteria embedded in the approach to culture and arts in the city, there may not be a venue on every doorstep. However, one of the things that the original piece of research that informed this inquiry noted was that there are arts organisations spread throughout the city. Furthermore, the location of an organisation does not always correspond with the location of the work that it does or the participants and audience it accesses. All core funded organisations have a catchment area greater than one ward, and many organisations have at least a city-wide catchment area.

Organisations applying to Belfast City Council for funding are also given an opportunity to demonstrate how they inspire communities. While the amount of and approach to outreach work varies considerably across organisations, we estimate that 80% of funded clients programme outreach and audience development activity as part of their core programme, accounting for 94% of our total funding budget. This includes 31% of funded organisations that could be classified as mainly participatory arts, including community arts, which have access and participation at their core. The community festivals fund is another example that provides funding for festivals that are designed for or by geographic communities or communities of interest. Again, this is something that you need to note when considering research, because, often, this type of activity is not captured by that research. Community festivals is also one of our most oversubscribed funds, and many more festivals are run across the city without this funding.

Does cultural engagement and social inclusion really work? The council carries out independent evaluations of specific projects to assess success in increasing social inclusion through cultural engagement. In particular, we did two pieces of evaluation around two Peace III funded programmes. The evaluation found evidence that there is a causal link between cultural engagement and greater social inclusion, and concluded that, as a result of the programme delivery, outreach projects have effected attitudinal change in participants, including an increased awareness of and a willingness to engage with culture and arts activities and a willingness to go outside their own area. In cross-community working, there has been increased respect and understanding between generations and cultures, an increased knowledge of the history of their communities and a willingness to share their experiences.

I mentioned that we specifically have an inspiring communities theme in the framework. Our corporate plan recognises that our people and our communities are the lifeblood of our city, and that engaging active communities is not the by-product of a successful city; it is a prerequisite for its success. In the development of the framework, councillors and other stakeholders emphasised that engaging communities across the city must be a priority. This theme is all about connecting the diverse people and communities of Belfast to its rich culture, arts and heritage. Community arts and audience development all create opportunities and encourage people to learn new skills. It is a significant achievement in its own right to do this, but these activities also help to grow audiences for the whole cultural scene.

What do we aim to achieve through the inspiring communities theme? We want to remove barriers to participation; enable people to value and understand their place; develop shared cultural spaces; and target areas and communities with low levels of engagement in culture and arts currently. Core funding of the arts is undoubtedly vital in achieving that. However, we also recognise that additional longer-term interventions are absolutely required for lasting impact and reaching new communities.

So, what did we do? In September 2013, we got together with the Arts Council to launch a new landmark fund for the arts and heritage called Creative and Cultural Belfast. That fund was created in recognition that, while culture and arts should inspire us, bring us together and teach us about ourselves and others, there are undoubtedly some people in communities who are less likely to take part. That can be due, in part, to lack of economic opportunity, educational achievement or other barriers.

Creative and Cultural Belfast specifically seeks to challenge social exclusion by providing everyone in Belfast with the opportunity to experience something new. Applications had to demonstrate how projects supported our framework. In particular, they had to be cross-community and cross-city, delivered in partnership between the cultural sector and the community sector, and directly benefiting hard-to-reach areas and communities, including people who had never participated in arts before.

Most public funding is tied to one financial year, but this scheme is different. The level of partnership working and community engagement that was required meant that we delivered 18-month to three-year programmes. The total investment was £900,000, shared equally between the two main funders, but, unfortunately, we had 12 times more interest in the fund than we had funding to give out.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): Sorry to interrupt, but are you getting near the end?

Ms Henry: Yes.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): That is fine; go ahead.

Ms Henry: Four projects were announced in March 2014, and we will announce a further three projects under the scheme in March 2015.

To conclude, we would like to make a number of recommendations for improvements in policies, delivery mechanisms and collaborations among key stakeholders, including ourselves as a council. We would like arts policy and funding to recognise that different arts organisations have different aims, priorities and areas of expertise, and that different art forms appeal to different and diverse ranges of people and communities. We would also like policy to be based on sound evidence. If working-class communities are to be targeted, that needs to be based on research demonstrating the need, as well as a clear definition of who the target group should be. That research should look at the sector holistically and take into account diverse audiences for non-ticketed activities and in non-traditional arts venues.

All intervention should be based on best practice and targeted at those organisations that are best placed to make a difference. Similarly, we should recognise that there is a wealth of arts activity already programmed across the city, and we need to make sure that all of our residents and visitors are aware that that is currently taking place. More funding should undoubtedly be made available to support bespoke development initiatives over longer periods of time. That does take more money.

Finally, projects should benefit from longer-term development and evaluation. Community groups are sometimes concerned that approaches from arts organisations are tokenistic, while arts organisations are concerned that genuine, sustainable partnerships cannot be built within a one-year funding cycle. Benefits may also not be realised until several years into a project, so, again, we must look at research over longer periods of time.

We thank you for the opportunity to present, and we welcome any questions.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): Very good. Thanks very much. Apologies for cutting you short. We do recognise your enthusiasm for your job. I will start off with just a couple of points. I understand from the briefing to the inquiry so far — I am a new member here — that one of the big issues is about transport for schools and groups to attend events. I suppose it is not just arts events, but it is in relation to this. The second point is this: what are the arts? Is there an issue about people's perception of the arts? Are they of benefit to working-class communities? How do you break that perception down and make it attractive to everyone? Are those barriers that you have come up against? I would appreciate your comments on those points.

Mr Johnston: Clearly there is the issue of the cost of transport for schools, and we recognise that in a much broader sense than culture and arts. Even in the council agenda, one of our key objectives is about moving people across the city and trying to see how we can do that better. We are working with Translink on the public transport side, but the council's role in that is probably a bit more ad hoc on the schools side. However, there is definitely an issue there with the schools budget being tighter than ever, and that is one of the things that could be —

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): It is a challenge.

Mr Johnston: Absolutely. In terms of the perceptions of arts, we would have that even within the council and our development committee.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): Even among members?

Mr Johnston: To an extent. Part of our challenge is to sell to members that culture and arts is not just what we term the highbrow events; it is the broad spectrum. There is a genuine effort on our side. It is not piecemeal or tokenistic. I met Mr Humphrey on a number of occasions around some of the events that they organise on the Shankill. There is a perception issue. A lot of the events and festivals are a good way of engaging with the community. As Eimear said, because we are looking at ticketed systems, a lot of the figures that we have do not reflect how the general public engages with

the arts at all sorts of different levels. That is a long-winded way of saying that perception is definitely an issue, and it is one of the barriers that we recognise.

Ms Henry: From my experience, we need to be careful not to put too much emphasis on transport. Before I came to council, I worked in theatre for children for eight years, and a lot of our work was delivered directly in schools as well as bringing kids out into the venues and arts centres. There are greater barriers that need to be addressed.

With regard to transport, there are a number of venues on people's doorsteps, and you find the arts in all sorts of unusual places. It is not a case of having to get a bus into the city centre to see something. I also think that it is about building relationships, certainly with the schools sector, with teachers so that they understand the role and the real value that the arts can play in terms of delivering to kids and their education objectives. Sometimes the cost of transport can be seen to be a major barrier, but I definitely think that there are other barriers that should be a priority when you look at what needs to be addressed.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): William, your name has been mentioned, so you are going to have to address some of these issues.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you both very much for your time here today and for your presentation. As a former chair of the development committee — I declare that — in the City Hall, I very much know and value the work that you guys do.

Eimear, you mentioned transport. We have had evidence from a number of groups across the city that goes against what you just said. I appreciate the background that you come from. For example, the New Lodge Arts people said that if they had more transportation, they could take more people to the MAC, although I share your point that it is not terribly far away from the New Lodge. Equally, we had the same point from Spectrum, and the same point was made to us when we were at the Lyric. They said that they struggled to get people to come because of bus routes and so on. I am just making that point.

There is always the challenge from councillors about protecting front-line services, and the sort of stuff that you are doing is an add-on or whatever. What about the cost to the ratepayer? Belfast led the way in terms of a European unit, excellently led by Laura Leonard. Have you been able to access money from Europe to help you with the work that you are talking about?

Ms Henry: The majority of this type of work is funded in partnership with other funders. The best practice examples are Creative Legacies and city festivals. As I said during my presentation, they were both Peace III funded programmes, so absolutely. Creative and Cultural Belfast is the big flagship project that we are driving at the moment. The Arts Council puts in the same amount of money that we put in to deliver it. We have had success, and we continue to look. A new Creative Europe has just come online, and we are working up our bid for that. We are also waiting to see what the priorities will be under Peace IV.

Mr Humphrey: Ignore any negative comments that you might hear from the Chair. You did not hear them, which is good. Is there a greater focus —

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): That was about Belfast getting everything. Go on.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thought it was the north-west, Chair.

Mr Humphrey: If you do not ask, you do not get. Is there a greater focus, or could there be a greater focus? When I was on council, I represented some of the most deprived wards in the United Kingdom. Could there be, or has there been, more of an emphasis from councils on targeting wards where there are huge socio-economic difficulties, high levels of unemployment, poor education attainment and so on?

Ms Henry: Those were some of the criteria for Creative and Cultural Belfast. Look at the projects that were funded under that: for example, we are funding a project with some of the most deprived areas of east Belfast, working with very young children and their parents through Sure Start. We are also doing projects with the Golden Thread Gallery, the North Belfast Interface Network and the Lower Shankill Community Association that are specifically targeted at some of the most deprived wards in

the city. Similarly, those factors were absolutely critical to the criteria for some of the EU-funded stuff, and the organisations that were funded under that were those that could demonstrate that they were going directly into those communities and reaching those beneficiaries. Similarly, a lot of the community festival fund is delivered directly in those communities.

Mr Humphrey: Finally, you said that you were hugely oversubscribed on community festivals, and I know that that is always the case. Is there a balance across the city, across the cultures and across the community with the allocation of those funds?

Mr Johnston: We constantly monitor that across our broad range of funds. It is not that we proactively go out and try to make sure that we have an equal number from each jurisdiction, but we have done the research, and the vast majority of the organisations operate across the city. So, while only a small number of our core clients are actually based in the east of the city, the activity that is delivered by the companies from the north, south and west of the city typically rolls out across the city.

We are very mindful of that. We do not have parameters to make sure that organisations from each area are equally represented, but we make sure that, when projects are rolled out, they are done across the city.

Mr Humphrey: Brian, you have to remember that there are groups with a huge capacity and those with no capacity, and if they are locked out, or it is a closed shop to them because the groups with the capacity apply and continue to get, how do the new groups that may be formed — the new communities we have in this city, for example — get in and their share of the cake if those with the capacity continue to get it? You have to be ever-mindful of that.

Mr Johnston: As Eimear said, the processes are very competitive. People have become more sophisticated to get the funding, and there is a really high scoring threshold. We have a "strengthen the sector" theme in the cultural framework that is about trying to build capacity. We have identified different parts of the city where there are capacity issues, and you see those when you look at where the applications come from. As officers, if we are approached by groups, we will go out and work with them to build capacity and enable them to be ready when we start our next round of core multi-annual funding. It will be equally competitive again, but that approach makes sure that it is not just the usual suspects and that we give opportunities to as many organisations as possible.

Mr Humphrey: I welcome that; capacity or the lack of it is a huge issue. Thanks again, and thanks for your time.

Mrs McKeivitt: I will be brief, so I am going to put a couple of questions in together —

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): Good.

Mrs McKeivitt: — because I know that we are restricted by time this afternoon. One in four applications is recommended for funding. You talked about the quality of the applications and the scoring. There is a possibility — a high risk — that the same groups will get the money year in and year out. What is Belfast City Council doing to encourage groups that may have difficulties in travelling to venues outside their areas to apply for funding so that the community has those activities on their doorstep? What are you doing to encourage that? Are you giving them help with application forms etc?

Mr Johnston: We deliberately roll out the workshops in each part of the city — the north, south, east, west and the Shankill — and the turnout is very good. There are probably marked differences between the areas. We have also learned, with the venues we have used over the past two or three years, how to make sure that we get more people to come along.

In terms of capacity issues, as I said, if we are approached by a group, we will go out as officers. Each of the officers are champions for the groups they work with, and we keep adding to that list. We go out and work with groups and try to bring them up to a certain level.

The Arts Council also has its core funding for groups, and it is very important for group sustainability to get some of that core funding. The project funding is fine, but the likes of CFF funding, which it is very targeted at community festivals, has a different set of parameters.

There are opportunities there already, but we are keen, as officers, to work with the groups to upskill them and build the capacity. We have a budget in place under "strengthen the sector". We recently did research with a lot of the groups we work with to see what their issues are, because, obviously, in the light of funding cuts, they have difficulties. Where can we really help? We are asking the sector what we can do and responding to that, as opposed to just sitting —

Ms Henry: We have made considerable changes. Over the past 18 months, we have changed arrangements so that the administration of grants is separate. As development officers, our job is to develop arts in communities in the city. We work geographically, and we also have a number of organisations for which we are the dedicated officer. To that one in four, we follow up with the three people that were not successful, look at other ways that they can access funding and talk to them about how they can improve their applications for the next time. We also work closely with them to try to build their capacity.

Mrs McKevitt: Have you seen an increase in that?

Ms Henry: We have, and you will see a difference in the number of new groups that are coming through. That is absolutely what we want. We do not want the funding to always go to the same groups, but in order for it to go to new groups, we need to work with those new groups to build their capacity.

Mrs McKevitt: The other point that I want to touch on is the EU funding. You have tapped into that. Will you share your experience about that? How were you able to sell the arts to the EU? Were there any difficulties or any positives?

Ms Henry: EU funding is absolutely positive in terms of what it enables us to do and what extra it enables us to do. However, it is very difficult funding to access, and administering it is extremely difficult and time-consuming. We try to keep the majority of the administrative burden on us, so that makes it a more attractive proposition for the organisations that deliver it on our behalf. That funding has been really positive across the city, and some of the best feedback that we have ever got has come from projects that are associated with EU funding. However, it takes a lot of dedicated resource to get it and manage it.

Mr Johnston: We are also tapped into a lot of European networks, which makes it easier. You start to see applications developing where partners have already started to come together. Wherever that suits the city agenda, we can tap in because we are in those networks.

Mr McMullan: Thank you for the presentation. It is quite obvious that you have a good team behind you, accessing all these grants to bring down all this money. I congratulate you on that.

Is it possible that the groups that have come before the Committee that expressed a difficulty with transport are relying on transport too much and are not looking more at the arts or whatever it is that they are doing? It is quite evident from your delivery that you do not see that as a problem. Is it possible that they could look at it in a different way? These groups have expressed this difficulty here in different presentation. Has it been a major thing in your follow-up to groups that do and do not receive funding? Has transport been up there in their priorities with regard to difficulty in accessing the arts or anything at all?

Ms Henry: I am not able to give exact percentages, but certainly, in my experience of assessing applications, not that many applicants directly ask us to cover transport costs, yet, in certain circumstances, they are eligible. I am not saying that transport is not an issue or barrier, but I think that it is part of a bigger mix and a bigger problem. I think that there is lots of stuff that you can do to overcome transport difficulties by taking stuff directly into communities. There are also a number of free activities. That means that you do not have any ticket price, so your only cost is to get somebody there. I know the type of things that I would have done previously. I would have offered free events because I could take that cost myself, and then the only thing that the school needed to do was pay for its bus. It is when you have a bus price and a ticket price, and then need to think about lunch and everything else to take a school out for the day, that it becomes just not feasible.

Mr McMullan: Do you have any type of matrix or anything so that one group does not receive funding all of the time, and that sort of thing, or do you look at whether a group is really bringing benefit into the city with a community festival, or something like that, and that it does get funding? The question

was raised that maybe some bigger groups are getting the bulk or all of the funding and there is nothing left for any of the smaller ones.

Mr Johnston: There is definitely an issue there. Typically, you will find, with the grants that we and other organisations distribute that the same names and groups come up quite a lot of the time because they have built their capacity and are great at filling in applications. Our community festival fund, which you part-fund, allows us to be a bit more discerning. The parameters are different for that than they would be for our core funding. I would say that it is partly a problem, but because some of the organisations have grown and developed over time and become more sophisticated in their grant applications, we do not really say, "Well, you got from that pot, so you cannot have from this pot." It is all down to the quality of the application.

Ms Henry: There is no historic funding, though, in that every application is considered completely afresh. We do not take into consideration previous applications, so people's funding can change considerably from year to year. You can go from being really successful to unsuccessful, and vice versa.

Mr McMullan: I have a last question, Chair. Is there such a thing as overlap? I think you know where I am coming from on this one. For a lot of these groups coming in, there is an overlap because you may have a group there and smaller groups coming in, when really they should have got their heads together and been one group instead of overlapping each other. Is there a question of overlapping in applications or funding?

Ms Henry: I know that obviously with the current cuts, the Arts Council is making quite a big priority of organisations having to look at how to share resources and funding. We have encouraged that with some of the funds that we have done. I do not think that we are ever going to say that organisations should merge. They have very distinct and separate roles, but, in order to access funding, we absolutely encourage them to work in partnership, because their impact can be greater. I think that you will see lots of really successful examples of that in the city where organisations are distinct but they have come together to access money and deliver some really good projects.

Mr Johnston: We work quite closely with the Arts Council to make sure that whatever its funding priorities are, ours add value as opposed to overlapping them. We had a really good session with it last week, when we talked about ensuring that we were lined up and were not trying to do the same thing. We have our distinct role in that.

Mr McMullan: That is grand. Thank you very much.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thanks for the presentation. Given the commitment of Belfast City Council to cultural diversity, how does the council encourage or support the Irish language, and how do you make Belfast City Council a welcoming place for Irish speakers?

Mr Johnston: If I am honest, I probably cannot answer that. It probably falls outside the remit of our unit. We could come back with a response on that.

Ms Henry: We support a number of Irish-language projects through our funding. The big project that got £300,000 under Creative and Cultural Belfast is a collaboration between an Cultúrlann and the Spectrum Centre. It is a bilingual project. It has been funded as such. There are a number of small projects. Equally, we fund a number of Ulster Scots projects under project funding as well. They are absolutely considered with the same merit as all of the different cultural-diversity projects are considered with when they apply for funding.

Mr Johnston: It is fully down to the quality of their applications in each case.

Ms McCorley: Yes, but maybe you will be aware that the Irish language has a particular place in terms of its recognition under the European Charter. There are also thousands of Irish-speakers in Belfast, not to mention beyond. I just wonder how welcome you would say Belfast City Council makes those people feel. I am not making you responsible. What is your sense of that? I am not actually getting a very positive response.

Ms Henry: Certainly, my sense of it, having come into culture and arts in the council, is that we recognise that language is a really important part of people's cultural identity across the board. We

fund some really good and exciting projects. We absolutely support those proposals. I am not aware of any kind of wider policy.

Mr Johnston: I have to say that, from sitting at council and committee meetings, I do not sense any negativity towards language in any shape or form. I think that it is a very respectful environment. That is just from my daily workings and dealings of being in committees. Like I say, I find committees to be very functional and very respectful of those opinions.

Ms McCorley: OK. Well, you are obviously not aware that Belfast City Council has been in court this week over its policy on bilingual street signage.

Mr Johnston: All that I can say is that that is my experience of the city council.

Ms McCorley: Thank you. Go raibh maith agat.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne): OK. That is great. Thanks very much for your contribution. It is very much appreciated. It has been very useful. It will obviously contribute towards our report, and, no doubt, you will get a copy of it in due course. Thanks very much indeed.