

Place and Economy Department

Economic Development Division



Belfast
City Council

Dealt with by Lesley-Ann O'Donnell

Date June 2026

Email odonnelll@belfastcity.gov.uk

Department for Communities Northern Ireland

Dear Officer

On behalf of Belfast City Council, we welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department for Communities consultation on a new Museums Policy for Northern Ireland.

The Council recognises the importance of this consultation in shaping a new ten-year framework to support a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive museums sector. Our response aligns closely with the Council's cultural priorities, including delivery of our cultural strategy, support for inclusive economic growth, and the development of Belfast as a leading cultural destination.

The Council has completed the formal consultation response via the required online questionnaire. However, as this format is primarily based on scaled responses (e.g. "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") with limited opportunity for detailed narrative, we are providing this supplementary letter to articulate our key strategic considerations and priorities in greater detail.

As a key civic partner in the cultural and heritage landscape, Belfast City Council recognises the important role of museums in preserving and interpreting our shared heritage, supporting wellbeing, and contributing to the economic and social vitality of the city and wider region.

In alignment with our existing strategic priorities and future ambitions, including the development of Belfast Stories, we wish to highlight the following key areas:

Cultural Strategy Alignment

We support the proposed vision and policy direction, particularly the emphasis on connecting communities, enhancing wellbeing, and ensuring access to heritage. Museums are central to delivering on these ambitions and should be recognised as core cultural infrastructure within the wider civic and cultural ecosystem.

Alignment with Place-Based Cultural Development

The policy should explicitly recognise the role of museums within wider place-making and regeneration frameworks. Museums act as key cultural anchors within neighbourhoods, supporting local identity, civic pride and economic activity.

Neighbourhood Tourism and Place-Making

We emphasise the role of museums in supporting neighbourhood tourism and place-based development. Local museums and heritage assets act as anchors within

communities, helping to distribute visitor activity beyond the city centre and creating more inclusive economic benefit through cultural tourism.

Preservation and Promotion of Heritage

We strongly support continued investment in the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage. This includes collections, traditional skills, oral histories and community narratives. Ensuring these assets are protected while also being actively interpreted and shared is critical to maintaining their relevance and impact.

Partnership Working

We welcome the strong focus within the policy on partnership and collaboration. Effective delivery will require coordinated working between central and local government, cultural institutions, tourism bodies, and community organisations. Local government plays a key role in convening and enabling these partnerships at a place-based level.

Animation of Spaces and Public Engagement

Museums should be supported as dynamic civic spaces, contributing to the animation of the city through programming, events and community engagement. Investment in outreach and participatory activity is essential to increase access, particularly among underrepresented groups.

Innovation and Belfast Stories

We recognise the opportunity to align the policy with major city-scale initiatives such as Belfast Stories. This includes supporting new approaches to storytelling, digital innovation, and audience engagement, as well as strengthening the connection between heritage, tourism and contemporary cultural identity.

Alignment with Belfast Stories and Strategic Cultural Infrastructure

The Council highlights the opportunity to align policy delivery with major cultural infrastructure initiatives such as Belfast Stories, which will demonstrate the transformative potential of storytelling, heritage and audience engagement at scale.

Sector Sustainability and Skills

We support the emphasis on building resilience across the sector, including through skills development, workforce capacity, and sustainable funding models. Continued investment will be essential to maintain standards, support innovation, and ensure long-term sustainability.

Sustainable Funding and Long-Term Resilience

While the proposed actions are welcomed, their success will depend on sustained and strategic investment. The Council encourages continued exploration of diverse funding models and long-term financial planning.

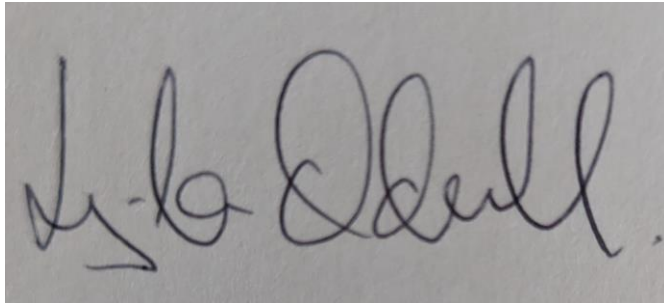
In conclusion, Belfast City Council is supportive of the development of a new Museums Policy and believes it provides a strong opportunity to strengthen the sector, enhance collaboration, and maximise the role of museums in delivering social, cultural and economic outcomes.

We look forward to continued engagement with the Department for Communities and sector partners in progressing this important work.

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Thank you for considering our response.

Yours sincerely

A photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored surface. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'Lesley-Ann O'Donnell'.

Lesley-Ann O'Donnell
Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism