



Subject:	Writers of Belfast Art Collection
Date:	10 August 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Eimear Henry, Assistant Tourism, Culture & Arts Manager

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Provide Members with details of a proposal that has been received from the artist Neil Shawcross to produce a collection of art for the city entitled <i>Writers of Belfast</i>.– Seek approval to proceed with the project
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Note the contents of this report and the proposal to produce a <i>Writers of Belfast</i> exhibition– Agree to accept the gift of the art collection on behalf of the city and the original painting depicting <i>Dickens at the Ulster Hall</i>– Approve a budget of up to £10,000 to support the wider delivery of the project
3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> <p>A proposal has been received from Belfast based artist Neil Shawcross to produce a new collection of art entitled <i>Writers of Belfast</i>. This collection would celebrate up to 20 famous Belfast novelists, poets, playwrights and song writers. This collection would then be gifted</p>

to the city.

- 3.2 Born in Kearsley, Lancashire, Neil Shawcross has painted and worked in Belfast for over 50 years. He has exhibited widely throughout Ireland and in London, Hong Kong and the U.S.A. His work is much sought after, and is included in many private and corporate collections. He has received numerous art awards.
- 3.3 Neil is an elected member of both the Royal Ulster Academy and the Royal Hibernian Academy. Shawcross was Professor of Painting at the College of Art in Belfast until his retirement in 2004. In December 2014 he was awarded an MBE for services to the Arts in Northern Ireland.
- 3.4 For a number of years much of Neil Shawcross's practice has focussed on literature linked pieces initially with interpretations of Penguin book covers before expanding to include other publishers. Examples of this work are on display at Conor Cafe in Stranmillis.
- 3.5 The proposal is to combine his established practice with his appreciation for Belfast's literary and musical heritage to produce up to 20 new works depicting book covers of work by Belfast novelists, poets, playwrights and songwriters. A final selection of writers will be made by the artist in consultation with Council officers and will be representative of the breadth of Belfast's literary and musical heritage. In keeping with Neil Shawcross's approach it is likely that the work will be captured on canvasses 7ft by 4ft. Featured living writers will be asked to produce a written commentary in response to the artwork which will then form part of the final exhibition.
- 3.6 A public exhibition will be held in an appropriate venue in Belfast with a launch event and marketing campaign to raise awareness of the initiative. Additional activities will include engagement with local groups and schools. There will be opportunities for local audiences to engage with the literary heritage of their area.
- 3.7 Further options following the opening exhibition include part of the collection to tour internationally with potential to examine Sister Cities linkages. The long term proposal is that the collection of individual pieces would be displayed in venues across the city and then potentially in the proposed Belfast Story visitor attraction.

3.8	<p>As well as the significant financial value of this collection the project has a number of wider benefits including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – helping to position the city as a cultural and literary centre nationally and internationally – celebrating the city’s cultural and literary heritage including raising awareness with local communities – enhancing the tourism offer
3.9	<p>An additional offer has also been made by Neil Shawcross to gift an existing painting to the Ulster Hall. Charles Dickens famously visited the Ulster Hall in 1858, 1867, and 1869. Based on these historic events Belfast born writer and performer, Sam McCready, created a one man show in 2012 called <i>Dickens at the Ulster Hall</i>. Neil Shawcross has captured this in a painting and he would now like to gift this to Council to be displayed at the Ulster Hall.</p>
	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>
3.10	<p>A budget of £10,000 from existing budgets to be allocated to support the costs associated with installing, launching and marketing the event as well as additional community engagement activities.</p>
3.11	<p>A staff resource will also be allocated to act as point of contact with Neil Shawcross and co-ordinate the public exhibition and associated activities.</p>
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p>
3.12	<p>Equality and Good Relations considerations will be accounted for when designing the wider programme of activity that will support the exhibition.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None