

## **CULTURAL PROVISION REVIEW GROUP**

**24th January 2013**

**PRESENT** – Councillors Carson, Grundy, Harman, Lawton, Lewis, Long (in the Chair) and E.A Richmond.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Baldwin, Cossins, L. Hughes and Wright.

**OFFICERS** – Mike Crawshaw, Cultural Services Manager, Stephen Wiper, Creative Darlington Manager, Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor Wallis.

**Purpose of the Meeting** – To consider the current position on the provision of culture for the Borough of Darlington and to comment on the Draft Creative Darlington Business Plan.

### **Points Discussed and Considered -**

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that the discussion would focus on the Draft Creative Darlington Business Plan. However, prior to that discussion the Chair welcomed comments following the announcement on Tuesday that the Arts Council had rejected a bid for funding from Project Vane. Although Project Vane was not dependent on the funding it was considered that the Arts Council support was an important catalyst to get investors on board. Mike Crawshaw advised the Group that it was disappointing news and that he felt that there were inconsistencies with the thought process of the Arts Council. Discussions were currently being held with the Arts Council and a further round of funding opportunities were available however at this stage it was undecided whether to re-submit the application or offer an alternative submission.
- Councillor Wallis stated that there had been vibes as to how well the Project Vane concept fitted in with private sector finance to fund the arts; there had been very little funding awarded to the north east as opposed to other areas of the UK; and the scheme would have got national recognition if funding had been awarded.
- Members questioned why the north east had received no funding when London and the south east had received a total of 39 per cent of the funding allocation – it was felt that funding had been awarded to existing facilities and not new opportunities as was the case with Project Vane. The Review Group was advised that the next round of funding was expected to be 2013/14 although this had not yet been announced.

Stephen Wiper, Creative Darlington Manager then gave the Group an overview of the Draft Creative Darlington Business Plan (previously circulated) and the following points were discussed and considered :-

- Creative Darlington has a board consisting of 21 people with a wide variety of expertise however the average attendance of meetings was 8 to 10, it was therefore agreed to form working groups to focus on areas such as income generation, programming and communications and for the groups to report back to the board. It was also stated that there were 40 to 50 applications to sit on the Board; every person added value to the Arts; and outside organisations had the potential to gain fresh funding for Darlington.
- Following a question Stephen Wiper explained that he regularly met with organisations that wanted match-funding, gave advice on how to process their applications, frequently engaged with the Board and businesses and reiterated the need to retain that flexibility.
- A Member questioned the remit of the Board, its responsibility to Darlington Borough Council (DBC) and the conflict of interest of some members who did not live in the Borough.
- It was stated that DBC was strategic and that Creative Darlington would liaise with DBC's external funding advisors to minimise the likelihood of competing applications from Darlington based individuals and organisations to funders of arts activity. Mike Crawshaw also advised the Group that Darlington For Culture (DFC) would oversee the whole network and this had been clearly set out from the outset. DFC had done a very good job recently and their role was fully supported within the Creative Darlington process. There was a need to focus on driving strategic relationships forward.
- A Member had concerns that Creative Darlington considered itself independent with its own set of guidelines and aspirations, there was a need for DBC to retain democratic accountability as it was responsible to provide culture.
- Councillor Wallis stated that the Board was a practical response to raise funds and bring expertise for the Arts. He understood the concerns around accountability but DBC needed to support and encourage the Board.
- It was also confirmed that it was critical that Creative Darlington remain accountable to Darlington rather than policy be driven by national arts organisations based on Tyneside or elsewhere in the north east and Officers would ensure it was driven that way, the Paymasters are DBC.
- The chair advised the Group that regional museums got funding through Regional Renaissance, the Sage Gateshead got funding which was fed down to Darlington and there was a need to ensure that Darlington kept sight of that.
- Mike Crawshaw confirmed that the Arts Council now demanded more accountability and it was imperative to have the relevant people on the Darlington Creative Board.
- It was suggested that more should be made of the voluntary groups around the Borough such as the Rotary Club which hosted various events included Young Musician, Young Sportsman and Young Chef of the Year. These groups could

have much to offer at little costs to DBC.

- It was suggested that in the Creative Darlington Business Plan the scope of creativity supported through Creative Darlington was not defined and that clearer definition of the Creative Darlington remit would be useful, the Executive Summary should outline what was in the report; and that the Action Plan should include a measurement or indicator with possible feedback from the Group most affected by a particular Action Point.
- The Group were advised that all relocated Arts Groups were being contacted in order to gain their feedback on the process and a satisfaction survey would be formulated.
- Concerns were raised that the Arts were being 'put in a box' and did not tie in with the cultural life of the country.
- The Chair suggested that Darlington for Culture be invited to attend the next meeting of the Group to answer any questions Members might have.
- The Group were informed that Creative Darlington was working across different partners to access funding in order to make arts more accessible to the people, it was part of education, health and leisure and there was a need to make all groups feel included.
- Following concerns expressed as to the relationship of the Civic Theatre with the business plan the Group were advised that an opportunity existed to make the role of the Theatre more explicit. The Civic Theatre will be involved in hosting five productions from 2013 to 2015 supported by the Arts Council Strategic Touring programme and is engaging with amateur and voluntary organisations and businesses based in Darlington.
- The chair was keen to get as many groups as possible, including industrial regeneration, under the brand of Creative Darlington and was pleased to hear that work was on-going on this.
- The Group was also advised that all community groups would be made aware that they could access Creative Darlington to submit funds and gain support for the process for bids.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) That thanks be extended to Stephen Wiper and Mike Crawshaw for their continuing work around provision of culture for Darlington.

(b) That the Board Membership be circulated to this Review Group.

(c) That the Business Plan be amended to include a preamble to explain what Creative Darlington was, the Executive Summary be amended to outline the content of the report and the Action Plan include a measurement or indicator.

(d) That the Group applaud the work done on branding and suggest that this should be applied to any art in the Borough.

(e) That the Civic Theatre be included within the Creative Darlington Business Plan.

(f) That the Group endorses the approach to co-ordinate funding opportunities to ensure there are no duplications.