



Andrew Boff AM
Chair of the London Assembly
City Hall
Kamal Chunchie Way
London
E161ZE

5 December 2023

Dear Andrew,

Response to London Assembly (Plenary) – 8 June 2023

Thank you for your letter dated 12th June 2023.

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the delay in coming back to you. We were under the impression that a response had been sent in June, but that does not appear to be the case. Please accept my apologies for this.

Let me reassure you that Arts Council England's support for opera is unwavering. Of the many artforms we invest in, opera remains one of the most highly funded. We are committed to supporting opera and are investing over £130 million in it over the next 3 years. This investment will go to large, mid-sized and small companies performing across the country in opera houses, theatres, and non- traditional venues. It is important that we support all these types of organisations to develop the wide audience and talent pool opera needs to thrive.

We understand London's importance as a world leading cultural hub. London still receives a third of Arts Council funding, at the same time, the rest of the country also has the right to expect greater investment from public money, which we have achieved in this round. London is home to 264 Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations, receiving a total investment of more than £147.8million per year between 2023-26. It is also home to 16 Investment Principles Support Organisations with a total investment of more than £3.7million per year between 2023-26.

Our 2023-26 investment round was the most oversubscribed portfolio to date, with 1,723 applications requesting over £2 billion. Our decisions were driven by our strategy '[Let's Create](#)' and by a commitment to provide a fairer spread of investment across the country. We also had to deliver on the instruction from Government to invest the additional funding from the spending review to benefit areas outside of London, to increase investment in the rest of the country by 2026 and to reduce its overall current investment in the National Portfolio in London by £24 million per year (read more about the instruction [here](#)). As a result, change in how we invested in London was inevitable, and we had to make difficult decisions and choose between good, fundable applications.



Whilst we did not fund the ENO through the 2023-26 National Portfolio programme, when we announced the new Portfolio in November 2022, we also announced that we would be putting in place unique arrangements to support them. We have set aside funding to help them develop a new main base outside London, while continuing to deliver a meaningful annual London season, producing and presenting opera at the London Coliseum as well as operating the venue year-round as a platform for other organisations including English National Ballet as well as commercial hires. The joint ambition between Arts Council and the ENO is for the company to be in a strong position to apply to the next National Portfolio round.

In total, Arts Council England will be investing £35.46 million in the ENO between 2023-26. The ENO received £11.46 million to support its work in 2023/24, to allow for appropriate planning and consultation to take place. In July 2023 we awarded the ENO an additional grant of £24 million for April 2024 to March 2026. We also extended the time frame for the ENO to complete the establishment of a new main base outside the capital from March 2026 to March 2029, to create a smoother transition for the company.

Following a rigorous assessment process, the ENO have [announced today](#) that they will be establishing a new base within Greater Manchester by 2029, delivering performances, wellbeing and learning activity with multiple partners and venues across the city-region, whilst continuing its substantial opera season – in addition to continuing to offer outstanding learning and participation and health and wellbeing opportunities for Londoners – every year at its London home, the London Coliseum.

The ENO team has inspiring ideas to bring their excellent work to people in Greater Manchester to explore a range of new ways of presenting opera. We understand this is a challenging period of transition for the company and its staff, but we have been working closely with the leadership team at the ENO to support them. We do not underestimate the impact for the individuals concerned but we understand that the ENO's management have also started consultations with several trade unions. Within the financial constraints we are working under, we will be as flexible as we can in terms of the conditions attached to any future funding agreement we have with the ENO to maximise the changes of a positive outcome from those negotiations.

Thank you again for your letter, and for sharing the Assembly's concerns over ENO, and I would be happy to meet with you and other Assembly Members should you wish to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Darren Henley CBE
Chief Executive