



<b>Subject:</b>	<i>A City Imagining</i> Investment Programme: Cultural multi-annual grants
<b>Date:</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> June 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Chris McCreery, Culture Development Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Some time in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Update Members on the investment programme that supports the cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining 2020-2030</i>.</li><li>– Update members on the independent review of Cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG)</li><li>– Seek approval for the opening of the cultural multi-annual two-year and four-year scheme in August 2023 for funding from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2028.</li><li>– Seek approval for the continuation of Pathfinder in 2023/24</li></ul>

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note the contents of this report and agree to open cultural multi-annual grants in August 2023 for Arts and Heritage organisations and Events and Festivals for funding from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2028 subject to final recommendations being agreed by Committee in January 2024</li> <li>- Approval the continuation of Pathfinder in 2023/24</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p><b>Background to Cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG)</b></p> <p>At a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 28 August 2019, a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, <i>A City Imagining</i>, was agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved including phased implementation of new funding programmes. Similar to the Belfast Agenda, the recommended investment model for culture proposed a new partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast. This investment is central to creating positive cultural, social and economic impacts for the city, delivering on our overall targets for the period, positioning Belfast as a regional driver, and creating the conditions for long-term transformation.</p>
3.2	<p>As included in the strategy, the aims of the cultural investment model are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- support the cultural life of the city by enabling citizens to be active, dynamic and creative agents of change</li> <li>- invest in the cultural and creative sectors skills development and capacity for production and innovation</li> <li>- position Belfast as an international testing ground for new approaches to cultural engagement, development and placemaking</li> <li>- establish Belfast as a cultural destination.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p>The first phased implementation of the cultural investment model commenced with the opening of a competitive funding programme for cultural multi-annual grants for the period April 2020 to March 2024. It was agreed that these multi-annual grants would cover two main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arts and heritage organisations, which have a year-round programme of cultural activity (<i>Anchor</i> four-year grants and <i>Enable</i> two-year grants)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Festivals and events organisations, which have a festival or event with an audience of 65,000 or more (<i>Imagine</i> four-year grants), or an audience of 10,000 or more (<i>Activate</i> two-year grants) by end of grant period.</li> </ul>
3.4	<p>These two strands of funding, Arts and Heritage and Festivals and Events, each with two tiers of investment available (two-year and four-year) replaced previous core multi-annual funding for arts and heritage and previous one-off funding agreements to events and festivals awarded on an annual basis via the Committee process.</p>
3.5	<p>The Arts and Heritage strand of funding is similar to and replaced the established core multi annual funding first implemented in 2013. It was designed to sustain our existing cultural offer covering both programmes and infrastructure. The Festivals and Events strand of funding was a new element and was designed to develop large events and festivals that will help Belfast become a year-round events destination. Furthermore it created a transparent and open process in line with the arts and heritage funding process.</p>
3.6	<p><b>Plans and process for launch of Cultural multi-annual funding</b></p> <p>In advance of the new financial year in April 2024, it is planned to launch CMAG in August 2023 with approval of awards and contracts by March 2023. A summary of this timeline is included below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open call for application submissions – early August 2023</li> <li>• Information sessions for applicants – August 2023</li> <li>• Submission deadline for application – September/October 2023</li> <li>• Eligibility check, scoring, officer assessment and independent assessment – Oct to Dec 2023</li> <li>• Committee Approval of awards - January 2024</li> <li>• Council Ratification approval of awards - February 2024</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>Similar to other grants, Cultural Multi-Annual Grants will be advertised widely. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information and application details emailed directly to a GDPR compliant mailing list representing over 370 organisations from across the cultural and creative sectors.</li> <li>• Information shared with sectoral networks, websites and socials including the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Community Arts Partnership.</li> </ul>

- Promotion through Council communication channels
- Three information sessions and one-to-one meetings held in advance of the deadline.

Criteria for Decision making

3.8

Assessments will be made, and scoring applied under three key areas of criteria:

- Quality of programme: this includes their vision, content, audience experience and marketing and audience development.
- Impact of activity: this includes how the programme contributes to the four strategic themes (A City Belonging, A City Challenging, A City Creating and A City Exploring) and how they will monitor and evaluate that impact.
- Readiness for investment: this includes planning, financial management, staff, governance, and environmental impact.

Assessments will be made only based on information supplied by the applicant within their submission. This will include the application form and supporting documentation such as business plans and strategies.

Principles of the Assessment Process

3.9

Applications are received and eligibility checked by the Central Grants Unit before being passed to officers for scoring. Officers undertake a thorough assessment of all eligible applications. Applications and assessments are discussed and agreed at an internal moderation panel. An independent assessment panel co-ordinated by Central Grants Unit and chaired by a Senior Managers is then convened. The role of this assessment panel is 'to ensure that the scoring of applications has been undertaken in an appropriate fashion and to provide verification or validation of sampled applications and the overall process'.

**Review of current scheme**

3.10

As part of the evaluation framework for CMAG, it was agreed there should be a summative evaluation of both the monitoring and evaluation process and programme impact carried out by an independent evaluator. In April 2023 Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent consulting to carry out a review of CMAG.

The first cycle of CMAG coincided with a period of unprecedented change in the operating environment, including the Covid-19 pandemic, which seriously limited the

	<p>ability of festivals, events and cultural sectors to deliver activities and outcomes that would contribute to the overall impact of CMAG and the Investment Programme.</p>
3.11	<p>Due to the challenges of the past four years, the evaluation focused primarily on a process review, exploring what worked well and what could be improved. Specifically, the report sought feedback from grantees, unsuccessful applicants, and key Belfast City Council staff. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A survey which was completed by 34 grantees and 8 unsuccessful applicants</li> <li>• Four workshops attended by 23 participants from 20 grantee organisations</li> <li>• One-to-one, semi-structured interviews with a further 11 grantees and three unsuccessful applicants that were also Transition recipients.</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key Belfast City Council staff including Central Grants Unit, the Culture and Arts Unit, staff involved in the design or assessment of CMAG and senior management</li> </ul>
3.12	<p>This Primary research was supplemented by desk research including CMAG guidance notes and application form, the Cultural Investment Model, CMAG monitoring data, the internal review of CMAG in 2021, the Draft CMAG evaluation framework and the “City Imagining” cultural strategy 2020-2030. Detailed feedback across each area is available in Appendix 1.</p>
3.13	<p><b>Recommendations from the review</b></p> <p>The report authors found that “there is evidence that Belfast City Council’s CMAG programme follows a robust process and is designed to support the council’s strategic ambitions as set down in A City Imagining.”. Furthermore, it concluded that in keeping with National Audit Office good practice guidance, there is evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk is managed on a spectrum dependent on the type (restricted project and unrestricted grant-in-aid), value and duration of the grant.</li> <li>• It is not risk averse but balances the risk to the council and the grantee, in particular in relation to Imagine and Activate grants.</li> <li>• It is built on a previous comparator scheme and utilises expertise of those with understanding of the sector and experience of similar grant schemes, including Central Grants Unit.</li> <li>• Uptake of funding was accurately projected, and there is balance, on one hand, between encouraging uptake and minimising administrative burdens and, on the</li> </ul>

3.14	<p>other, ensuring that the support is used as intended, and the council is confident that the funding targets and benefits the right organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sector has been engaged in the review of the scheme after both two and four years, which will influence the next cycle of funding.</li> <li>• There is no similar multi-annual strategic fund open to the sector.</li> </ul> <p>However, it has not been possible to robustly evaluate whether CMAG has achieved its aims or the extent to which it contributed to A City Imagining outcomes. This is largely due to extenuating circumstances in the external and internal operating environment which meant neither the council nor the sector could operate as planned.</p> <p>The report highlights a range of recommendations intended to further enhance the grant process, impact and evaluation, namely:</p>
3.15	<p><u>Relationship management and support</u></p> <p>The report highlighted the importance of one-to-one relationship management, stating that “staff in BCC should also be supported to take on a more developmental role, including training, time to develop relationships and time in lieu to attend funding events and activities.”. Whilst much of this developmental work was impacted by the pandemic and staff changes in the Culture Unit, the importance of relationship management has been reflected in the new structure of the culture team and its corresponding workplans.</p>
3.16	<p>Respondents also reflected the importance of wraparound support, particularly on areas such as accessibility and environmental sustainability. This support, including establishing a Green Arts Forum and a partnership with the University of Atypical to train disability champions, has been reflected in the Culture Workplan 23-24 which was agreed by members in the April 2023 Committee.</p>
3.17	<p>Several respondents also indicated their desire to build relationships with councillors. To address this need, officers will explore options for information and networking sessions between CMAG clients and members.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Eligibility criteria</u></p> <p>Arts and heritage eligibility criteria including audience and turnover are based on historic baselines. However, the impact of the pandemic has created peaks and troughs, and recent baselines are no longer robust. It is therefore recommended that arts and heritage organisations are allowed to base their application on projections (as per</p>

	festivals and events applicants) with the caveat that historic performance will be used to assess whether projections are realistic.
3.19	Similarly, the pandemic has had an impact on audience numbers over the previous three years. It is recommended that the council analyse recent monitoring returns to consider whether audience eligibility criteria are still appropriate.
3.20	It is recommended that council should consider removing the requirement for a minimum number of volunteers. Instead, it should ensure that it is satisfied that volunteering is considered within the assessment criteria as an indicator of A City Belonging, Challenging or Creating.
	<u>Duration and level of funding</u>
3.21	To manage expectations, the council should agree in advance whether applicants can expect a significant change in funding or should request an incremental increase or standstill and communicate this to applicants. The council should also consider telling applicants the average value of grants made in the first round, and the number and value of grants it intends to make in the second cycle.
3.22	The report stated that council should consider awarding all grants on a four-year basis subject to developing a longer-term project fund of scale that could support new and emerging organisations. Officers are mindful of this feedback and the desire for longer term funding from across the sector. However, such a material change to the scheme would require extensive screening and consultation and will be considered for any subsequent reviews of CMAG.
3.23	The report recommended that the council should review existing project funding with a view to introducing a longer-term project fund of scale that would reduce pressure on CMAG and help support a diverse ecosystem. Officials will all engage with the sector to investigate opportunities for dynamic and longer term project funding.
	<u>Application process, evaluation and monitoring</u>
3.24	The report identified the need to provide support for applicants through information sessions and advice clinics, alongside clear consistent messaging to ensure that all applicants understand the purpose of the fund. These information sessions have been built into the planned rollout of the programme alongside a communications plan to

	<p>announce the dates of opening and closing the grant as far in advance as possible. A more enhanced evaluation process, in consultation with grantees, will be implemented to enable evidence to be collected throughout the next four-year cycle.</p>
3.25	<p>Many respondents across all sectors recommended that the council should change the names of the funds. It is recommended to change the name of the funds to refer to them by their descriptors (E.g. four-year arts and heritage, two-year festivals)</p>
3.26	<p><u>Assessment process</u></p> <p>There were several recommendations relating to the assessment process, including providing applicants with more detail on the assessment process and criteria, using external subject matter expertise to assess at least Imagine applications, providing training to new assessors and reviewing the application form should be reviewed to identify any questions or attachments (such as board minutes) that could be removed or made only applicable to four-year applicants. It is also recommended that the administration of all grants should be migrated back to Central Grants Unit. All of these recommendations will be incorporated into the planned rollout of the programme.</p> <p><u>Transition</u></p>
3.27	<p>The council should consider how it will support any existing Imagine or Anchor client that applies unsuccessfully in the second cycle. However, it is not recommended that the council provides a formal scheme such as Transition. Rather, given the variance in Anchor awards in particular, this should be done on a case-by-case basis.</p>
3.28	<p><b>Pathfinder for 2023/24</b></p> <p>In February 2022, £79,768 was agreed in relation to four Pathfinder grants which had been designed to address a specific gap in funding. Members agreed that awards were extended for a further two years from 2022-24. The programme was designed to support those organisations that have a specific development need and are currently not in a position to drawdown core funding from the public sector. Based on monitoring of these awards to date, agreement is sought to continue this scheme for the second of the two years in line with the portfolio of two-year Cultural Multi-Annual Grants 2022-2024.</p> <p>Given that the establishment and future of Pathfinder is directly related to CMAG, officials will continue to assess whether the scheme is still applicable during and after</p>



<p>3.29</p> <p>3.30</p>	<p>the rollout of CMAG. Recommendations on whether to continue the scheme beyond 2024 will be brought to members in late 2023.</p> <p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>There are no new financial commitments relating to Cultural Multi Annual Grants and will be met with existing departmental budgets for 2023-24.</p> <p>An allocation of £79,768.00 will be made in 2023/24 year to extend the Pathfinder Awards and again this will be met from existing departmental budgets.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>The cultural strategy, A City Imagining has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p><b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b></p> <p>Appendix 1 - Review of Belfast City Council's Cultural Multi-Annual Grants Programme</p>