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| Subject: | Cultural Strategy – Participatory Budgeting <i>Bank of Ideas</i> |
| Date: | 05 February 2025 |
| Reporting Officer: | Damien Martin, Strategic Director Place and Economy |
| Contact Officer: | Chris McCreery – Cultural Development Manager |

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometime in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues |
| 1.1 | To provide an update to the Committee on the proposed opening of Cultural Participatory Budgeting scheme – Bank of Ideas – as a core part of the engagement delivery for the Cultural Strategy <i>A City Imagining</i> workplan 2025/26. |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2. | It is recommended that Members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Note the contents of this report and agree to open the Cultural Participatory Budgeting scheme “<i>Bank of Ideas</i>” on 19th March 2025 as part of the core delivery of the cultural strategy workplan for 2025/26. |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| 3.1 | <u>Background and context</u> As part of Belfast 2024 Creative Me Programme, a participatory budgeting scheme was created to fund creative ideas from individuals and groups across the city. This scheme, called The Bank of Ideas, awarded £50,000, divided equally between ideas for North, South, East, West, and the City Centre. Residents within a community could submit their creative ideas for funding. The projects were then voted on by residents to allow the allocation of funding. |
| 3.2 | <u>The rationale for the project</u> The pilot Bank of Ideas programme delivered on a range of priorities within the cultural strategy. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a more accessible way for individuals and un-constituted groups to access funding and participate in cultural activity by proposing and delivering creative ideas in their local area. • The funding provides a ‘stepping stones’ approach for those who do not have capacity yet to access grants, with a focus on capacity building to enable groups/individuals to build skills needed to develop creative work and access funding in the future. This grassroots approach allows for the avoidance of duplication whilst adding value to existing small grants ecosystem. • The participatory nature of allocating the funds through a decision-making public vote meant that residents of Belfast became co-curators of the Belfast 2024 programme. This increased ownership over the definition of ‘creativity’ and therefore enhanced sense of belonging, civic pride and agency. |
| 3.3 | <u>Impact of the programme</u> The 2024 Bank of Ideas project funded 28 projects, with over 4,842 people involved in the total project number. Additionally, 2,253 people cast votes in the process. The average award under the Bank of Ideas was £2,000. |

3.4 Capacity building and City-wide reach

The capacity building and idea generating phase of the fund involved 26 idea generating workshops and drop-in sessions across Belfast to help people come up with and develop their ideas. These sessions took place across the city in informal, approachable settings such as local cafes, community centres and arts centres. This led to an application process and then a voting date run in City Hall where citizens voted on the projects they wanted to see funded.

Post award the capacity building elements continued with additional sessions aimed to bringing people together and supporting capacity building, sharing information on other funding sources, how to become constituted, audience development and collaboration. This was available for all applicants and not just those who were successful.

3.5 The breakdown of voters across the city is detailed below:

| Area of the City | Votes Cast |
|------------------|------------|
| North | 475 |
| South | 390 |
| East | 505 |
| West | 296 |
| City Centre | 587 |
| Total | 2,253 |

3.6 Recognition

There has been recognition for the success of the Bank of Ideas project, including:

- Belfast 2024 lead on Bank of Idea's is participating in the Design Team for the next phase of Belfast Health Development Unit's Participatory Budgeting on the theme of wellbeing.
- The Place and Tourism Manager in Fife Council, Scotland has approached Belfast 2024 team to share best practice and support the delivery of their own Participatory Budgeting fund based on the work we have developed.
- Belfast City Council have been shortlisted for 18th International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) Best Practice in Citizen Participation Award and are speaking at the IOPD Conference in October 2024. From that conference, officers from Reykjavik who were also presenting on Participatory Budgeting are planning to visit Belfast in early Spring to explore participatory democracy practices and intercultural projects.

3.7 Key learnings from the 2024 pilot

There are a number of key learnings from the original pilot which will be taken forward into phase 2 delivery in 2025/26. These include:

- Practical realisation of the Cultural Strategy delivery – voting and engagement fosters a sense of belonging, the ideas generation supports creativity and innovation. The programme is created, delivered, and decided by the people of Belfast enabling active participation and promoting active citizenship.
- Participatory budgeting as a method for decision making delivers increased transparency and supports active citizenship by giving residents the power to make decisions on the activity they want to see in the city.
- Viable grant making process, significant numbers of projects came forward ranging from small community-based events to skills and storytelling projects.
- The scheme has funded a range of groups across a number of diverse sectors; such as PUL (Spectrum Centre), disability-led groups (Black Moon), BAME groups (Belfast Massage Project)
- Ideas generation workshops facilitated the production of new work, building of new collaborations between groups and individuals and led to wide impact throughout the city.
- The Participatory Budgeting process builds trust in council while promoting the cultural strategy- this is an access point for communities and individuals who may not necessarily see themselves as being part of cultural activity in the city and to engage with culture and creativity - contributing to the realisation of the Cultural Strategy.
- Proportionality of process must be balanced with managing risk and prudent project delivery including eligibility, reputation, and financial management. Following feedback, this phase of the project will now include an additional eligibility check and declaration process as part of the project initiation process.
- To ensure the engagement and delivery is of the highest standard significant resource requirement in terms of staff time and capacity is needed and sufficient promotion including social media.

3.8 Contributions to council objectives

- The projects during the first phase of Bank of Ideas contributed to a range of council objectives such as:
 - Wellbeing - Chill with Gill Yoga with Suicide Awareness, Wonder Bubble Magic, Dreamer's Space GROW Community Garden & Cavehill Conservation
 - Young people & Older People - Lower Oldpark Community Association Children's Community Library & Bookclub, The Meadow Heart Mosaic Project at Bog Meadows, Spectrum Centre Young People's Ausume Rascal's Art Explosion

- Good Relations – Cosmopolitan Cooking Club by Forward South, Cregagh and Woodstock Diversity Carnival, Ballynafest Community Fair
- Placemaking – Sailortown Regeneration: A Brush with History, East Belfast Late Night Art
- Climate outcomes - The Wee Swap event for children’s clothes and toys, Bee Wildflowers seedbomb making
- Good Relations – Cosmopolitan Cooking Club by Forward South, Cregagh and Woodstock Diversity Carnival, Ballynafest Community Fair
- Accessibility – Black Moon Accessible Pop Up Picnic Party, Between Galaxies Theatre Show for Children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities

3.9 Recommendation for 2025-26 Financial year

The delivery of Bank of Idea’s 2024 closed in November 2024. It is recommended that the Bank of Idea’s as a participatory budgeting model continues in 2025-2026 as part of the core delivery of the cultural strategy workplan and commitments to engagement with citizens via strategic priorities.

After consultation with the sector there is an evident appetite for the project and to see it continue. This was a new pilot project for Belfast 2024 and much of the work done this year was an investment in developing the process which can be replicated.

In order to implement a second run of the Bank of Ideas in 2025 to a similar timeline, the planning process would need to begin Spring 2025 (detail on timeline below). This aligns with how other small grants run on an annual basis – the planning, guidance and application stage is open before the new financial year, under the caveat that it is subject to budget approval by committee for the new financial year.

3.10 Proposed budget

The proposed budget for the programme is similar to the pilot programme delivered in 2024. The budget is broken down as follows:

| Financial Year | Budget Heading | Budget Description | Amount |
|----------------|--|--|--------|
| 2025-26 | Initiation of 2025 Bank of Idea’s – Design phase | Design team, application development and Support Workshops | £2,000 |

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| | | | for ideation in advance of process | |
| 2025-26 | Capacity building | | Venue hire across city for yearlong workshops, accessibility and facilitation support for applicants and projects, consultation with external community and arts organisations city wide, design work | £4,500 |
| 2025-26 | Voting Day | | Voting Day Event Costs – potential to do 2 events next year as current year was at capacity for City Hall | £7,000 |
| 2025-26 | Final Evaluation and Celebration event | | Exhibition creation and evaluation costs | £3,000 |
| Total Design and Implementation Budget | | | | £16,500 |
| 2025-26 | Funding Pot | | 50,000 (10k per area, minimum 5 projects) | £50,000 |
| Total funding | | | | £66,500 |

3.11

Timeline

To ensure that funds would be received by awardees for delivery of projects in Summer/Autumn 2025, the following timeline would be required:

| Date | Details |
|---------------------------|--|
| Feb 2025 | Committee sign off in February 2025 Development of process to reopen including changes to application, schedule of workshops created and voting day event developed |
| 19th March 2025 | Applications Open – series of workshops delivered over these weeks to support idea generation |
| 6th May 2025 | Applications Close (After the bank holiday) |
| 10 th May 2025 | Criteria Check and feedback to applicants |

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| | 22 nd June 2025 | Voting Day – City Hall | |
| | 26 th June 2025 | Secondary eligibility check carried out re Declaration Risk check, results sent out. This is an Additional element of the process following learnings from the pilot project. | |
| | 2 nd July 2025 | Letters of offer issued. | |
| | 4 th August 2025 | 1 st Payments | |
| | August – Oct | Projects delivered | |
| | November | Celebration Event in November after all projects delivered | |
| 4.0 | <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> | | |
| | Funding for this project will be met from the recurrent budget for Cultural Development subject to Committee approval and confirmation of departmental budgets for 2025-26. Payments and costs won't be incurred until the new financial year. | | |
| 4.1 | <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> | | |
| | The Cultural Strategy - <i>A City Imagining</i> - carried out an extensive EQIA covering the duration of the strategy 2020-2030. The Council's Culture team have a dedicated, full time and permanent Engagement Officer focussed on accessing a wide range of marginalised groups to co-design an extensive Engagement Programme which has fed directly into the development and delivery of the Belfast 2024 programme. | | |
| 5.0 | <u>Appendices - Documents Attached</u> | | |
| | There are no appendices for this report. | | |
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