



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Social Sofas public art proposal
Date:	18 February 2014
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officers:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	As Members will recall, at December Development Committee, Councillor Beattie outlined plans for the production of a community mosaic artwork, “Social sofas”, within the Beechmount area. Committee agreed that officers from within the Development Department would undertake an update to be submitted to a future meeting.
1.2	“Social sofa” sculptures are large concrete benches covered in a mosaic designed and made by an artist in partnership with local community groups. The aim of the project, which started in the Netherlands and has been rolled out in Holland and China, is to create functional and attractive public seating that can become a meeting point for local residents.
1.3	Officers from the Tourism, Culture and Arts (TCA) Unit have carried out further research in to the feasibility of this project, including the option to extend the project across the city. The findings of this research are detailed below.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<u>Budget</u> It is estimated that the cost of developing, commissioning, fabricating and installing one sofa is £18,700, made up of £4,800 for commissioning and £13,900 for production.
2.2	Economies of scale mean that some savings can be made by delivering a citywide project. The total cost of five sofas would be £84,400, made up of £18,400 for commissioning and £66,000 for production.
2.3	<u>Funding</u> The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) has indicated that the project would not be suitable for Re-imaging funding, which offers up to 100 per cent of projects costs and was the original, intended funding source. However, ACNI has

	<p>indicated that it may be suitable for their general public art funding, which is due to open imminently.</p>
2.4	<p>ACNI funding must follow a two-stage best practice delivery model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stage 1: Commissioning. The minimum grant available is £10,001, and the maximum is £25,000. - Stage 2: Production. The minimum grant available is £10,001, and the maximum is £75,000.
2.5	<p>Applications from public sector bodies such as the Council need to demonstrate a minimum of 50 per cent in-cash partnership funding. Applications made by voluntary and community organisations need to demonstrate a minimum of between 10 and 25 per cent partnership funding depending on the amount of funding applied for.</p>
2.6	<p><u>Delivery mechanism</u> The Council's Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit does not have the resources to directly deliver public art projects, and the cost of hiring a public art coordinator is included in costs.</p>
2.7	<p>Social sofas is a trademarked concept. Best practice and the terms and conditions of ACNI funding require that the artists are procured by select or open competition. In order to widen the number of artists and increase competition and the quality of responses, it is recommended that the artist's brief be widened to include all artist-led street furniture.</p>
2.8	<p><u>Stakeholders</u> A number of arts and community organisations have already expressed an interest in this project including Belfast Conflict Resolution Centre, Upper Springfield Development Trust, the Spectrum Centre and Community Arts Partnership.</p>
2.9	<p>A number of agencies across Belfast, including the PSNI, have raised concerns to public seating as it may encourage loitering and anti-social behaviour. However, if founded on robust community consultation and engagement and with careful selection of sites, it is felt that this project could engender ownership and mitigate against anti-social behaviour.</p>
2.10	<p><u>Maintenance, liability and insurance</u> There are two options for the ownership of the sculpture(s):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sculpture is owned by the partner community group, which is responsible for maintenance, liability, insurance and permissions. In most cases, planning permission will be required for installation on ground not owned or maintained by the Council. 2. The sculpture is owned by the Council. Maintenance requirements can be specified in the project brief and applications can be assessed against this, minimising cost. This is option is most feasible if the sculpture is to be placed on Council-owned and -maintained land, for example, parks. It is unlikely the sculpture would therefore require planning permission.
2.11	<p><u>Options</u> The requirement for 50 per cent match funding and a minimum grant of £10,001 means that the Council could not apply for funding for one sofa or for the commissioning cost of five sofas (the total cost is less than £20,000 in both</p>

	cases).
2.12	The Council could apply for funding for the production of five sofas. The contribution required from the Council would be £51,400 (£18,400 for commissioning and £33,000 match funding for the production).
2.13	The Council could appoint a suitably qualified external organisation to develop and deliver the programme. The successful contractor would be responsible for sourcing additional funding. A commitment of a minimum of £4,220 would help lever the remaining funding from ACNI.
2.14	The Council could work with interested community groups to develop applications for funding. Projects may apply for match revenue funding from the Council via the arts and heritage project fund.
2.15	A detailed exploration of options is included at appendix 1. The preferred option is option 4: Council contracts a third-party to develop the project.
2.16	It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report and agree the preferred option.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<u>Financial</u> A range of options are presented at appendix 1. The preferred option would cost £5,000 which is included in the 2014/15 draft budget estimates.
3.2	<u>Human resources</u> Depending on the option selected, the majority of the work load would be outsourced to a third party. Ongoing advice and guidance could be offered within the TCA Unit's current work plan.
3.3	<u>Assets</u> Depending on the location and ownership of the sculpture(s), the assets may be owned by the Council, which would be responsible for ongoing revenue costs.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Equality and good relations implications in relation to this policy are still under consideration. Further updates will be sent to the Equality and Diversity Officer in due course.

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report and agree the preferred option.

6	Decision Tracking
Timeline: June 2014	Reporting Officer: Brian Johnston

7	Key to Abbreviations
ACNI - Arts Council of Northern Ireland TCA - Tourism, Culture and Arts	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1: Options paper	

Appendix 1: Options paper

Option	What would this look like	Cost to Council	Risks	Opportunities
1. Do nothing	No public art is developed	£0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to enhance the city's physical infrastructure is missed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
2. Pilot in Beechmount area	One "social sofa" is developed and installed in the Beechmount area	£18,700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning permission and/or landowners permission not secured Expectation of funding for additional projects across Belfast Ongoing maintenance, liability and insurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced physical infrastructure Potential ground-breaking best practice model for other cities
3. Council applies for funding for citywide programme	Five sofas developed and installed across Belfast, managed by Belfast City Council	£51,400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliance of third-party funding Planning permission and/or landowners permission not secured Ongoing maintenance, liability and insurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced physical infrastructure Potential ground-breaking best practice model for other cities Installation on Council land may mitigate risks
4. Council contracts a third-party to develop the project	Five sofas funded, developed and installed across Belfast, managed by third-party	£5,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No interest among contractors Reliance on third-party contractor and funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced physical infrastructure Potential ground-breaking best practice model for other cities Long-term risks carried by third-party contractor
5. The Council works with community groups to develop proposals	Community groups develop projects and apply for funding direct	£0 to £10,000 per project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of interest or capacity among community groups Need for cash match-funding may lead to increased number of application to Council's small grants programme, which is already oversubscribed Expectation of additional Council funding Community groups may be unwilling or unable to commit to upkeep of sculpture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced physical infrastructure Potential ground-breaking best practice model for other cities Community ownership a prerequisite

