



Subject:	Pilot Public Art Project
Date:	27th March, 2019
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development, ext. 3470
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	Members will recall that, at the Committee meeting on 12 th September, 2018, it was agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting outlining options for Belfast to take forward a public art project involving utility boxes similar to the Dublin Canvas project.
1.2	The purpose of this report is to set out a proposal for a pilot project including details of approach and required budget.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – note the contents of this report and agree to progress a pilot project in the city centre and agree budget allocation; and – agree to receive a future update and consider options for extending the project to include Belfast Rapid Transport route.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>An initial request had been made for officers to investigate the potential for Belfast to deliver a public art project involving painting the utility boxes along the current BRT route. In parallel Council had also been in discussion about a similar project in the city centre working with the Destination CQ and Belfast One Business Improvement Districts. The BIDs had also had preliminary discussions with the utility providers.</p>
3.2	<p>Following assessment of various options and evaluation of schemes elsewhere it is proposed that the project is piloted in two phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1: City Centre – retail core Phase 2: Existing Belfast Rapid Transport route
3.3	<p>The rationale for this is threefold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the first phase of the pilot should focus on a smaller concentrated area in line with how other cities have successfully delivered similar projects – the secured support of the BIDs as project partners – alignment to ongoing City Centre Revitalisation programme
3.4	<p>The aims of the project would be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – create opportunities to animate the city – improve the look and feel of locations – celebrate Belfast’s street art culture – decrease incidences of graffiti/tagging, fly posting, and other anti-social behaviours associated with utility boxes – engage citizens in a creative programme, encouraging a sense of ownership over the city centre and their local area and – provide professional development opportunities for emerging/student artists.

Key Issues

3.5 Initial contact has been made with utility providers, BT, Virgin Media, and the Department for Infrastructure. BT and Virgin Media are supportive of the project, and permission has been given in principle to progress. The Department for Infrastructure are yet to grant their permission. However, there are sufficient private utility boxes in the main retail core of the city centre to deliver an effective project. It is hoped that a Council led and curated approach to the project would in turn convince DfI to consider involvement in a phase 2.

3.6 During April, May, and June, Belfast City Council will be in the Public Consultation phase of the new Cultural Strategy for 2020 – 2030. It is hoped that this project could fit within the Public Consultation process, as a creative element of public engagement, in a similar format to the pre-consultation (Y)Our Home civic engagement projects. With this in mind, artists, students, and community organisations involved in the restyling of utility boxes will be asked to respond creatively to the theme of *A City Imagining*. This concept provides an interesting stimulus with scope for a multitude of creative responses, while also giving the project a sense of coherency across sites.

3.7 *Considerations*

- full permission must be secured from the owners of the utility boxes.
 - At present BT and Virgin Media are on board, with the Department for Infrastructure still to confirm.
- based on research from 2008, the preferred medium is paint, rather than vinyl application. Designs installed on vinyl tend to peel, and are more difficult to maintain than a painted design.
- particular care must be taken by artists not to block ventilation systems / grates on utility boxes. These areas can be painted over, though must maintain a paint thickness of less than 5.5mm.
- all designs must be approved by BCC or commissioning partner before implementation can take place.
- an initial assessment of sites has been made however a full mapping exercise of all utility boxes in proposed areas will need to be completed.

3.8 *Learning from Belfast City Centre Management and Chamber of Commerce (2007/08)*
This proposed approach also takes into consideration the learning and outcomes of a similar project delivered in Belfast in 2008.

3.9

From October 2007 – May 2008, Belfast City Centre Management and Chamber of Commerce trialled the *Utility Box Initiative Pilot Scheme*. Nine utility boxes on Royal Avenue were decorated using either paint or vinyl application. Learnings from the close of project monitoring report include:

- success in the reduction of fly-posting while boxes were in good condition
- boxes should be continuously reviewed and maintained - damaged or peeling boxes were more likely to attract fly-posting or graffiti.
- boxes should be coated in an anti-graffiti sealant, so graffiti can be easily removed without damaging the design.
- vinyl designs were subject to deliberate tearing, and in general, vinyl was not considered a viable method for decorating utility boxes
- designs should be free of large areas of blank space, that may attract graffiti

3.10

Programme Plan

The proposed approach is focussed around three main strands.

Phase 1: City Centre

- Strand 1, May 2019: Commissioning artists
 - Delivered by professional (street) artists
 - Number of locations TBC – between 10 and 15 within BT1 and CQ to achieve impact.
 - Professional work in place to inspire and stimulate civic engagement project
- Strand 2, May - June 2019: Community engagement
 - Series of 4 civic engagement workshops per community group with professional street artists involved in commissioning project.
 - Working collaboratively with 6 community groups
 - Delivered in partnership with Council's Cleansing Services
 - Citizens take Street-art tour of commissioned boxes and Belfast Street art.
 - Use learning and experience to work with artist to create a further series of designs for a city centre utility boxes.
 - Artist implements design based on community input

- Strand 3, May - June 2019: Student engagement
 - Artists host professional development sessions for UU final year students – similar to a mini graduate scheme for those completing their degrees.
 - Exploring street art culture in Belfast
 - Guidance on use of medium, working to limitations, working to a brief – artists providing mentoring and support throughout student design process.
 - By end of June, students have the opportunity to design their own box (with BCC approval of concept)

3.11 After this structured approach to delivery, and depending on the level of success and public engagement, there is the potential to launch a fourth strand to the project, in which an open call for submissions is launched to the general public.

3.12 Public submissions would respond to a brief, and should include a conceptual sketch, and would be subject to approval by the Council. This would also provide a good opportunity for a wider campaign.

Phase 2: BRT route

3.13 Following an evaluation of phase 1, a more detailed proposal would be brought back to Committee for phase 2 to be delivered along the BRT route. Based on the effective and high quality delivery of phase 1 in the city centre support from DfI would also be sought. Given that proof of concept would have been established as part of phase 1 this next phase would commence with the community engagement and co-design approach. The timescale for this would be August 2019.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.14 The initial resource required for the delivery of phase one is £13,905 made up of:

Artist costs and materials: £4,000

Community engagement and workshops: £6,680

Student engagement: £1,025

Preparation and maintenance: £2,200

A contribution of £8,000 is to be allocated from existing departmental budgets with the remaining contribution to be made by the partners.

3.15	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u> Equality and good relations will be taken into consideration in the selection of the community participants.
4.0	Documents Attached
	None