



Subject:	Cultural Strategy Update – artist studios and maker spaces
Date:	9 February 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Eimear Henry, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

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After Council Decision

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Sometime in the future

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Never

☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the investment model for the cultural strategy and to set out proposals for a dedicated programme of work to support artist-led organisations in the city.
2.0	Recommendations

	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree to open a new funding scheme for artist led organisations to provide financial and development support as set out at 3.7 subject to officer recommendations being approved at a future meeting of Committee. - Agree to develop long-term options for the sustainable provision of artist studios in the city aligned to the priorities of the cultural strategy to be presented to a future meeting of Committee. - Agree to write to the Department for Communities and Arts Council of Northern Ireland to request that a joint response is taken forward to the current crisis in studio provision. - Agree for officers to operate a rolling support programme of micro-grants to artist-led organisations as set out at 3.13 to be approved by delegated authority.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>A <i>City Imagining</i> cultural strategy for Belfast recognises the need for long-term commitment over a decade in order to drive transformation. It presents a dynamic model for change to ensure resilience to external factors and potential social, economic and environmental shifts. While the full impact of Covid-19 still remains unknown and the level of change to the city's cultural and community infrastructure is uncertain, the strategy remains valid presenting a strong framework for a robust and long-term recovery plan</p>
3.2	<p>In support of the ambitions set out in this strategy an Investment Model was agreed with phased implementation and is included at appendix 1. To date this has resulted in the introduction of a number of funding strands and employment opportunities for cultural organisations and practitioners. These have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural multi-annual grants - Small grants including Community Festival Funding - Micro-grants and Leadership Awards - Creative Bursaries - Pathfinder Development Awards
3.3	<p>The diversification of the investment model recognised that the one sizes fit all model of funding does not deliver the best outcomes for the city and fails to increase the sustainability of the sector. Therefore, the design of these new programmes has been based on engagement with the sector and learnings from other cities. However, from the outset it was recognised that a targeted programme of support was required for artist studios and maker-spaces. This in part is due to the value of artist-led spaces not being effectively captured</p>

	<p>through traditional metrics such as income generated through ticket sales or audience figures. With the cultural multi-annual grants (4 year and 2 year) being agreed in February 2020 it was agreed that an alternative form of funding would be developed for artist-led spaces with the latest audit identifying 17 studios/ artist-led organisations in Belfast directly supporting an estimated 450 artists. Belfast City Council's current support programmes do not include any of these organisations as annual or multi-annual clients. Therefore, as Council is due to enter into another two-year cycle of funding, it is proposed that a complementary three strand programme for artist-led organisations is introduced and is detailed below.</p>
3.3	<p>The need</p> <p>The need for this programme has accelerated with the further decline in security of tenure for these groups with no organisation having a tenancy agreement for 3 years or more. Of the 17 organisations identified, 15 were on agreements for less than a year with 7 of these less than 9 months and many on month to month rolling contracts including licenses and tenancy at will agreements. (Source: Jane Morrow, PhD Researcher: the precarity of artists' studios in Belfast).</p>
3.4	<p>Case study: The Council has been working with Flax Art Studio and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland since 2014 to develop an artist and needs led solution to the provision of sustainable, affordable and appropriately specified studio space in the city. These studies demonstrated the potential for growth and the economic and social impact of studios as well as recommendations to address challenges relating to governance, capacity building, financing and acquisition. This work considered examples from elsewhere including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WASPS Artist Studios, Scotland - Broadstone Studios, Dublin - Fire Station Artist Studios, Dublin - National Sculpture Factory, Cork - ACME Studios, London
3.5	<p>From 2004 to 2018, Flax Art occupied premises on Corporation Street amounting to 1320 m2 of space that accommodated seven large and 11 smaller studios for 21 visual artists. It also accommodated a space for international residencies and a small workshop area.</p> <p>When Flax was required to vacate the premises in 2018 and in the absence of funding to acquire new premises, the organisation took the decision to take on 5200m2 at Havelock House as an opportunity to demonstrate proof of concept in relation to viable growth in</p>

provision. Since 2018, this pilot has confirmed many of the principles captured via the review of best/existing practice. It has confirmed that need exists, that visual artists are reliable tenants, and that Flax has the capacity and skills to diversify its income base through introducing new income streams. The result has been a main location at Havelock House where Flax provides subsidised studio space for almost 100 artists in Belfast. 31 emerging artists are supported at a temporary satellite site on North Street and 15 artists at a second satellite space on High Street. They also provide space for 7 production resident artists, 20 workshop members and 1 film-maker in residence, and co-working space for Nerve Belfast, the NI Screen Curator in Residence, Dumbworld and OGU Architects. However, in January 2022 Flax received notification of that their lease would not be extended and they must relocate their artists by the end of March 2022.

3.6 **Cultural Mapping**

As part of the implementation of the cultural strategy, the Council commissioned a cultural mapping of the city to assess current assets and gaps in infrastructure. The full draft of this report will be presented to Committee in quarter one of 2022/23 year. However, the draft report identifies *Space to Work* as the highest priority under short term recommendations as well as a key strategic priority for long-term action. Building on these recommendations and the investment model included within the cultural strategy a three-strand programme is proposed.

3.7 **Proposed Programme**

Strand one: organisational funding

The purpose of this strand of work is to provide financial and developmental support to organisations similar to the support offered under cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG). CMAG focuses on supporting wide ranging public facing programmes with criteria designed to assess impact against all of the themes of the cultural strategy. The most recent outcome of this process, with the failure of any studio or artist-led organisation to secure funding, reinforces the need identified in the wider investment model to establish more target schemes of funding. The criteria for a new programme will focus on the specific priorities within the strategy focused on supporting the cultural ecosystem of the city. Given that successful applicants will be in receipt of public funding, it is proposed that funding is accompanied by a health audit that identifies additional requirements in relation to a number of areas such as:

- Governance and management
- Sustainability including environmental planning and policies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion including accessibility
3.8	Where organisations require assistance to identify potential premises there is scope to align this to the existing work programme being undertaken by City Regeneration and Development.
3.9	It is proposed that this scheme opens in March 2022 with recommended awards to be presented to Committee for approval in May 2022.
3.10	<p><i>Strand two: strategic review</i></p> <p>In line with the cultural mapping and the work undertaken to date it is proposed a strategic review of artist studios and maker-spaces in Belfast is undertaken with a number of long-term recommendations presented to Committee. The scope of this work will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o analysis of existing strategies, studies and reports as well as primary research, to ascertain resource needs. o review of benchmarking with other cities with a focus on models of sustainability such as forms of financing. o analysis and mapping of current and potential availability, quality, and suitability of sectoral accommodation within the city. o recommendations on the role of artist spaces in city development with investment models to include public sector, private sector and partnerships.
3.11	<p>This work will be aligned to key priorities with the cultural strategy, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Priority 5: Embedding cultural impact in city development and local placemaking. - Priority 6: Investing in connected, resilient and sustainable infrastructure of quality cultural spaces across the city.
3.12	This strand of work will be taken forward with the sector through an agreed programme of co-design to be agreed through a series of initial engagement sessions.
3.13	<p><i>Strand three: Micro-grants rolling programme</i></p> <p>Consultation and engagement with the sector have demonstrated a need for more agile funding schemes that are available year-round and operate at a micro-grant level. It is proposed that a scheme offering a maximum of £1000 is introduced to support career development and support for individual artists working within artist-led organisations.</p>

3.14	<p>As part of cultural multi-annual grants, organisations are required to demonstrate how they provide training and support for those artists that work with them. The fact that many artist-led organisations either do not receive funding or have much lower levels of funding, often managed on a voluntary basis, means that their business model does not allow for re-investment in infrastructure, equipment or skills development. The criteria for this fund will align to theme three of the cultural strategy: <i>A City Exploring</i>.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.15 The existing departmental budget for Culture and Tourism includes provision for sector support. It is proposed that £150,000 is allocated to this programme as follows:</p> <p>Strand One - Organisational Funding: £100,000</p> <p>Strand Two - Strategic Review: £30,000</p> <p>Strand Three – Micro Grants: £20,000</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>3.16 Officers will work with partner organisations to ensure that engagement includes a wide range of groups, artists and individuals across the city and criteria for funding will respond to the Equality Impact Assessment carried out as part of the cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i>.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix One: <i>A City Imagining</i> Investment Model