



<b>Subject:</b>	Update on Culture Night
<b>Date:</b>	19 <sup>th</sup> April 2024
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Information relating to any individual</li><li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li><li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li><li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li><li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li><li>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</li><li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li></ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<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 provide further information to enable consideration of an issue raised by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Cllr Aine Grogan at last week's City Growth and Regeneration Committee under the procedures available to Members for raising an issue in advance that they wish to have included on the agenda.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the proposal from the Deputy Lord Mayor in the context of further information on how this could be facilitated, resourced and managed and the further action that would be required to provide confidence on the delivery of the option and its costs.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Deputy Lord Mayor Cllr Aine Grogan, outlined a suggestion to support cultural venues in the City to open on the evening of 'Culture Night' in September, within the Belfast 2024 Programme of events. The Committee agreed to refer the decision to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th April for consideration so that further detail of how this could be facilitated, resourced and managed could be provided.</p>
3.2	<p><u>The Culture Night concept</u></p> <p>Established in 2009, Culture Night Belfast was a large scale and free cultural event taking place in the Cathedral Quarter and city centre of Belfast. The concept traces its roots to an initiative of Temple Bar Cultural Trust / Dublin City Council in 2006. The first event in Dublin began as an innovative but relatively modest local event with 40 venues opening free and late in the evening in Dublin's Temple Bar, expanding citywide in 2007, more than doubling in size with 87 cultural institutions participating. From this foundation, the Culture Night concept has grown in scale and profile becoming an established and popular part of the cultural calendar across over 40 towns and cities throughout the island of Ireland alongside events internationally such as London, Paris, Berlin and New York.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Culture Night in Belfast</u></p> <p>Culture Night in Belfast began in 2009 when a number of arts organisations came together to organise the first Belfast Culture Night in September 2010. In 2012/13, the Cathedral Quarter Trust became the custodians of the event, delivering Culture Night in the city until the final event in 2019.</p>

3.4	<p>As the largest free shared cultural event in the city-centre, audiences grew to an attendance of over 100,000 for the 2019 event held across two days in September 2019. This event was delivered by a core team of a Creative producer, a programme assistant, a marketing manager, a freelance production manager, 15 area managers, internship placements and over 100 volunteers.</p>
3.5	<p>The budget for Culture Night ranged from £240k in 2016 to over £328k in 2019. Whilst Culture Night received £12,000 annually from the councils Core Multi Annual Funding programme from 2016 to 2020, the event also received £68,000 in 2019 with additional resource through the City Centre Revitalisation Funding. The event received the majority of its support coming from other statutory bodies including the Arts Council NI, The Executive Office, Department for Communities and Tourism NI alongside support from trusts and foundations and the private sector.</p>
3.6	<p>In 2020, the Cathedral Quarter Trust commissioned a Strategic Review and Three-year Development Plan for Culture Night Belfast. This review identified that whilst “Culture Night Belfast was an extremely well attended, much-appreciated and, to some extent, iconic city event, the existing model for Culture Night has become problematic.”. The report highlighted various concerns with the previous Culture Night model including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The audience for the event has grown exponentially whilst the volume and quality in the programme have not;</li> <li>• the idea that artists could, would or should give their time for free no longer sits comfortably; the audience’s relationship with the event has changed so that family audiences feel pushed out and unsafe;</li> <li>• Critically there is confusion over what the purpose of the event in how and what it delivers for the creative sector is and where the responsibility for it effectively achieving that purpose lies</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>This review was completed in spring 2022 and the Cathedral Quarter Trust did not run Culture Night in 2022, with organisers stating that the event had “become too big and unwieldy and the original intention of providing a platform for our artistic and cultural communities to connect with a much wider audience had been lost.</p>
3.8	<p>On 6<sup>th</sup> April 2023, the Cathedral Quarter Trust announced that it is “has been forced to cease day to day operational activity, including planning any cultural events, with immediate effect and for the foreseeable future, following the withdrawal of core funding by the Department</p>

for Communities.”. The statement continued “Following the withdrawal of its core funding CQT will not be directly involved in the delivery of any future Culture Night and as a Board we will continue to work with Belfast City Council and other stakeholders to explore all options around the future of this popular and important event.” In the absence of the Cathedral Quarter Trust, no organisation has taken on the lead organising and delivery role necessary to revive Culture Night in Belfast.

#### Culture Night in other locations

- 3.9 Through conversations with colleagues across various cities, officers in the Culture Development Team have been examining how Culture Night is delivered in other jurisdictions. In the Republic of Ireland, the Culture Night brand is managed centrally by the Arts Council Ireland, in partnership with local authorities and cultural organisations throughout the island of Ireland. As well as providing financial support to local authorities, Arts Council Ireland manage the core brand, website and major media partnerships such as broadcast events with RTE.
- 3.10 Whilst delivery models and challenges vary across different locations, Culture Night is largely led by local authorities in each area. Investment in Culture Night initiatives range from approximately €30k in Cork (led by council staff) to over €190k in Dublin.
- 3.11 As the largest Culture Night, Dublin Culture Night attracts over 100k people over 350 events. The event is embraced as an audience development initiative and is shaped through co-design with the arts sector. The event takes place across arts and cultural organisations and venues of all shapes and sizes, from independent studios and art-spaces to national cultural institutions, by extending opening hours to allow increased access for the public. Unique events and workshops are specifically programmed at participating locations and all activities are made available to the public free of charge. Unlike the Culture Night Belfast model, which was largely about converting the streets of the Cathedral Quarter into a pop-up venue with road closures and on street programming, Culture Night Dublin does not involve road closures and is spread across the whole city.
- 3.12 Dublin City Council manage the event through procurement for ‘single operator frameworks’, a multi annual arrangement which can be utilised for four years. This procurement covers the operator who in turn tender out for an event management company so they can recruit additional staff/assistants. The Dublin Council Events unit liaise with police/gardai and insure

the event. The procurement for the freelance event company is accountable to the arts manager in Dublin City Council.

#### Late Night Art

3.13 Late Night Art is an open-access celebration of arts in Belfast where Galleries and cultural venues open late on Thursday evenings (1<sup>st</sup> Thursday every month) to the public, showcasing new exhibitions and art installations across the city centre. The event, which is managed and led by the visual arts sector, has a long-established identity and has built a loyal and diverse audience base. The established regularity of the event happening on every first Thursday of every month is a key component of the event's success so far and has been established in the cultural calendar. Recent examples of success include audiences of over 600 people attending exhibition launches at Belfast Exposed & Arcade.

3.14 Officers in the Culture Development team have a strong working relationship with Belfast Visual Arts Forum (BVAF) as a collaborator, funder & steering group member. Throughout 2023/24, officers have worked with the sector to reform the forum and develop initiatives to enhance capacity and skills in the sector. As part of the 2024/25 Culture Development workplan, officers are committed to working with BVAF to help uplift and amplify Late Night Art as a significant cultural event for this city through investing in the development of this programme as well as the Marcomms activity promoting it.

#### Belfast 2024

3.15 *Belfast 2024* is a year-long celebration of home-grown culture featuring new and exciting events, theatre, music, and art developed through new co-design and partnership models with the city stakeholders, the creative sector and the citizens of Belfast. The year delivers on the aims of the City Council's Cultural and Tourism strategies, Belfast Agenda, *Bolder Vision* and City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. All founded in a belief and a commitment from Council that culture, sustainability, collaboration, partnership and people should be at the heart of the city's Development to:

- Work towards Belfast becoming a more 'attractive' place to live and work
- Addressing city dereliction, by increasing vibrancy and civic pride
- Recognise the Climate Crisis, develop awareness & change cultural behaviours
- Re-activate Belfast's Tourism Sector and develop our Cultural Tourism offer
- Deliver a distinct portfolio of city events connected to citizens and attracting international visitors promoting Belfast as a world-class cultural destination

3.16	<p>As part of the Belfast 2024 programme, there is a significant number of cultural events happening in the last two weeks of September including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- World Peace Day Block Party in Townsend St with Ulster Orchestra – 21st Sept</li> <li>- Launch of our digital playroom Wiggle Room</li> <li>- BBC Concert – Century of Stories at Waterfront – 24<sup>th</sup> Sept</li> <li>- Belfast Half Marathon – 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept</li> <li>- Shadow Dock at Thompson Dry Dock – 26 – 29<sup>th</sup> Sept</li> <li>- An Droichead Irish Language Dance Showcase</li> <li>- Drift River Installation - throughout</li> <li>- Late Night Art – 5<sup>th</sup> Sept and 3<sup>rd</sup> October</li> </ul>
3.17	<p><b><u>Options for a late night event in September 2024</u></b></p> <p>Following the discussion at City Growth and Regeneration Committee, council officers have examined options on how an event on the night of Culture Night could be facilitated, resourced and managed. In order to develop an evening event, consideration would need to be given to multiple factors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic – Is the event in one defined location (e.g. city centre, or a section of the city centre such as Cathedral Quarter) or open to the whole city</li> <li>• Support mechanisms – Is financial support available for groups to apply to or are organisations asked to contribute their own resources as an audience development tool</li> <li>• Thematically – Is the event focused on a particular artform or audience.</li> <li>• Delivery mechanism – Is this delivered via an external facilitator or internally in council</li> <li>• Marketing – Who leads on collation and promotion of the event</li> <li>• Budget – What are the requirements to make the event successful</li> </ul>
3.18	<p>Specific challenges and implications, including requirements for engagement with the sector are outlined below in relation to the options identified but it should be noted that the pressures on staff resource during Belfast 2024 are a consideration in all options. Further engagement would be also required on the options identified to assess deliverability.</p>

3.19

Option 1 – Extended Late Night Art

As a pre-existing event in the city with a defined list of galleries and participants, officers could consult with the organisers of Late Night Art to assess the appetite and feasibility of producing a special Late Night Art on 20<sup>th</sup> September.

However, it is important to note that Late Night Art is an audience development initiative created and managed by the visual arts sector, with Belfast City Council playing a supporting role in helping to amplify the event. Officers will need ample time to consult with the organisers of the event to explore the appetite and feasibility of an additional event on 20<sup>th</sup> September. It is also worth noting that the established regularity of this happening on every first Thursday is a key component of the event's success so far and has been established in the cultural calendar. Galleries & Studios will have their exhibition schedule and Artist contracts in place for the year. Any disruption to this date may negatively impact an Artists opening date, potentially dilute attendee number for openings and impact Late Night Arts profile as taking place on the first Thursday.

Given that the regular cadence and “first Thursday” principal is part of Late Night Arts success, an alternative approach could be to invest in a pilot event on the nights that are already scheduled. Two Late Night Art events are currently planned for the 5<sup>th</sup> September and 3<sup>rd</sup> October and depending on investment levels, these could be extended to increase audience engagement.

Supporting the Late Night Art concept, either through a bespoke event on the 20<sup>th</sup> September or investing the regular date in October, would require the administration of financial support to organisations who are part of the current Late Night Art ecosystem. There are currently circa 30 organisations/venues who participate in Late Night Art.

3.20

Option 2 – Procure an external organisation

Similar to how the delivery of Culture Night is managed in Dublin, one potential model is the procurement of an external organisation to manage an open call for a series of free events in venues across the city. This contractor would act as a receiving house, collating various events from willing participants under one banner and presenting them to the public as a cohesive programme. This external organisation would be expected to lead on programming, production and marketing of the event, with support from council officers.

Given the required approvals and time needed for a robust public procurement process, there are significant internal time and resource challenges to this approach. There are also acute resource pressures within the cultural sector which may negatively impact the response to an open call.

3.21 Option 3 – Produce the event internally through funding mechanisms

One possible approach to delivery of an event on 20<sup>th</sup> September would be to invite organisations to apply for small grants to develop and deliver events in venues throughout the city.

There are significant time and human resources required with this approach, particularly given the current workloads relating to delivery of Belfast 2024, the ambitions of the Cultural Workplan, delivery against the Music Strategy and the ongoing calendar of city and major events. This approach would result in Council effectively acting as curators for the night through selecting which projects receive financial support through funding. There is a current baseline as identified in a cultural mapping report delivered by the cultural team there is circa 141 cultural venues across the city who could be eligible for support. Mapping remains an ongoing workstream to reflect changes in the city landscape. Current data shows that the city is home to:

- 19 artists studios (places where artists rent/utilise studio spaces for their work)
- 39 Gallery & exhibition spaces (places where you can view/buy art including commercial galleries)
- 23 Museums & archives (open to the public)
- 26 music venues (places to hear live music with regular ticketed events. Does not include pubs)
- 34 theatres – Places where you can see live performances/comedy with a regular programme

3.22 Similar to other funding schemes full eligibility criteria, themes and outcomes would be required to be developed. In addition this scheme would still required additional central marketing support to promote.

3.23 Long term development of Culture Night

As an historically successful event in Belfast and a key part of the cultural calendar across multiple towns and cities globally, in recognition of benefits of having a sustainable and successful event in the city, Council officers have been exploring potential ways forward part



	<p>of the legacy planning from Belfast 2024 for September 2025 and onwards. This work to date has included meeting with officials involved in developing and delivering Culture Night in other jurisdictions to understanding funding and delivery models.</p> <p>The concept of Culture Night was initially developed as an audience development tool for the culture sector and this principal is the foundation of other successful Culture Nights such as Dublin. It is therefore vital that any development of a new iteration of Culture Night must begin with the Cultural and Creative Sector co design to ensure buy-in, ownership and the success of the event.</p> <p>In order to build a sustainable Culture Night in future years, it will also be necessary to secure significant buy in and investment from previous statutory funders and supporters such as Arts Council NI, British Council, Museums NI, BBC NI, National Heritage Lottery and finally from the broader business, institutional and educational sectors.</p> <p>Whilst Belfast City Council can act as a catalyst for the re-emergence of the event, there is significant merit in having an independent convenor of these conversations. The contracting of a convenor who could broker and bring together conversations and assess interest and capacity across the cities cultural and creative sector to enable BCC to forward the objectives of its Cultural Strategy.</p> <p><b><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>3.24 In the discussion held at CGR a proposal for circa £75k was discussed but how this would be utilised and the split of this against delivery and marketing support would depend on the option identified. There is no current allocation for this initiative within unit budgets or the Belfast 2024 programme budget and either budgets would need to be reallocated or funding would be required from central budgets and/or underspends. An understanding of available funds would be linked to the reporting of the year end position in June.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>3.25 The cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i> 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>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None